

Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405) is justly renowned for its full-scale assault on the misogynist stereotypes which dominated the culture of the Middle Ages. Rosalind Brown-Grant locates the *Cité* in the context of Christine's defence of women as it developed over a number of years and through a range of different texts. Arguing that Christine tailored her critique of misogyny according to the genre in which she was writing and the audience whom she was addressing, this study shows that Christine's case for women nonetheless had an underlying unity in its insistence on the moral, if not the social, equality of the sexes. Whilst Christine may not have been a radical in modern feminist terms, she was able to draw upon the cultural resources of her day in order to construct an intellectual authority for herself that challenged the prevailing orthodoxy of the medieval period.

Rosalind Brown-Grant lectures in the Department of French at the University of Leeds. She has translated Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* for Penguin Classics (1999), and has published essays on medieval literature and culture in numerous scholarly journals.

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

General editor

Alastair Minnis, *University of York*

Editorial board

Patrick Boyde, *University of Cambridge*

John Burrow, *University of Bristol*

Rita Copeland, *University of Minnesota*

Alan Deyermond, *University of London*

Peter Dronke, *University of Cambridge*

Simon Gaunt, *University of London*

Nigel Palmer, *University of Oxford*

Winthrop Wetherbee, *Cornell University*

This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval Latin and Greek – during the period c. 1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.

Recent titles in the series

- 32 Patricia E. Grieve *'Floire and Blancheflor' and the European Romance*
0 521 43162 X
- 33 Huw Pryce (ed.) *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* 0 521 57039 5
- 34 Mary Carruthers *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* 0 521 58232 6
- 35 Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart* 0 521 41153 x
- 36 Siân Echard *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* 0 521 62126 7
- 37 Fiona Somerset *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* 0 521 62154 2
- 38 Florence Percival *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* 0 521 41655 8
- 39 Christopher Cannon *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words*
0 521 59274 7

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at the end of the volume

CHRISTINE DE PIZAN AND
THE MORAL DEFENCE
OF WOMEN

Reading beyond gender

ROSALIND BROWN-GRANT



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Rosalind Brown-Grant 1999

The book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Baskerville 11/12 $\frac{1}{2}$ (CE)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 64194 2 hardback

*For Liliane, who first helped me
on to the 'chemin de long estude'*

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 The ‘querelle de la <i>Rose</i> ’: Christine’s critique of misogynist doctrine and literary practice	7
2 The <i>Epistre Othéa</i> : an ethical and allegorical alternative to the <i>Roman de la Rose</i> ?	52
3 The <i>Avision-Christine</i> : a female exemplar for the princely reader	89
4 The <i>Livre de la Cité des Dames</i> : generic transformation and the moral defence of women	128
5 The <i>Livre des Trois Vertus</i> : a betrayal of the <i>Cité</i> ?	175
Conclusion	215
<i>Index</i>	220

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jane H. M. Taylor and Peter F. Ainsworth for all their encouragement during the early stages of this project. In the field of ‘Christine studies’, I owe a great debt of thanks to the following colleagues either for their kindness in making their work available to me prior to publication or for their helpful advice: Angus J. Kennedy, Ann J. Kettle, Christine M. Laennec, Nadia Margolis, Glenda McLeod and Katharina M. Wilson, Karen Pratt, Benjamin Semple and Margarete Zimmermann. I am particularly grateful to Liliane Dulac for her generosity in giving me access to her extensive library when I was just starting out on this study, for her invaluable help on various articles which have been incorporated into it, for her inspirational scholarly works in the field, and for her friendship. This book is fondly dedicated to her. I am, above all, indebted to Steve Rigby for his unfailing support, critical rigour, and constant willingness to comment on innumerable draft versions of this book. The above are, of course, absolved of all responsibility for what follows.

Abbreviations

The following list of abbreviations includes the most frequently cited works by Christine de Pizan and other medieval authors as well as key secondary studies on Christine. Lack of space precludes the provision of a bibliography of all other primary and secondary sources but full bibliographical details of each item are given the first time it is cited in each chapter.

WORKS BY CHRISTINE DE PIZAN

- Avison: Lavision-Christine: Introduction and Text*, ed. Sister Mary Louis Towner, The Catholic University of America Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, 6 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1932).
- Cité*: Maureen Cheney Curnow, 'The *Livre de la Cité des Dames* of Christine de Pisan: a Critical Edition', 2 vols. (unpublished PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1975).
- Débat*: Christine de Pisan, Jean Gerson, Jean de Montreuil, Gontier and Pierre Col, *Le Débat sur le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks, Bibliothèque du XVe Siècle, 43 (Paris: Champion, 1977).
- Dieu d'Amours: Poems of Cupid, God of Love; Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre au dieu d'Amours' and 'Dit de la Rose'; Thomas Hoccleve's 'The Letter of Cupid'; George Sewell's 'The Proclamation of Cupid'*, ed. and trans. Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (Leiden: Brill, 1990).
- Duc des vrais amans: Christine de Pizan: Le livre du duc des vrais amans*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 124 (Binghampton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995).
- Fais et bonnes meurs: Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, ed. Suzanne Solente, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1936–40).
- Mutacion: Le Livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, ed. Suzanne Solente, 4 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1959–66).
- Othéa*: Halina D. Loukopoulos, 'Classical Mythology in the Works of Christine de Pisan, with an Edition of *L'Epistre Othéa* from the

List of abbreviations

- Manuscript Harley 4431' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Wayne State University, 1977).
Paix: Le 'Livre de la Paix' of Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (The Hague: Mouton, 1958).
Policie: Le Livre du corps de Policie, ed. Robert H. Lucas, (Geneva: Droz, 1967).
Trois Vertus: Le Livre des Trois Vertus, ed. Charity Cannon Willard and Eric Hicks, Bibliothèque du XVe siècle, 50 (Paris: Champion, 1989).

WORKS BY OTHER MEDIEVAL AUTHORS

- Boccaccio on Poetry: Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, ed. and trans. Charles G. Osgood (Indianapolis/New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1956).
Chavalier: Geoffroy de La Tour Landry, Le Livre du Chevalier de La Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon (Paris: Jannet, 1854).
City of God: St Augustine, Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
Confessio Amantis: John Gower, Confessio Amantis, in *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, Early English Texts Society, extra series 81, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, reprinted 1957).
De Casibus: Giovanni Boccaccio, De Casibus Virorum Illustrium, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci and Vittorio Zaccaria, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, vol. 9, I Classici Mondadori (Verona: Mondadori, 1970).
De Doctrina Christiana: St Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana; ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
De Mulieribus: Giovanni Boccaccio, De Claris Mulieribus, ed. Vittorio Zaccaria, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, vol. 10, I Classici Mondadori (Verona: Mondadori, 1970).
De Viris: Francesco Petrarca, De Viris Illustribus, ed. Guido Martellotti, 2 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1964).
Lamentations: Les Lamentations de Matheolus et le Livre de Leesce de Jehan le Fèvre, de Ressons, ed. A.-G. Van Hamel, 2 vols. (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1892–1905).
Livre des bonnes meurs: Jacques Legrand, Archiloge Sophie, Livre des bonnes meurs, ed. Evencio Beltran, Bibliothèque du XVe siècle, 49 (Paris: Champion, 1986).
Menagier: Le Menagier de Paris, ed. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
Œuvres complètes: Jean Gerson, Œuvres complètes, ed. P. Glorieux, 10 vols. (Paris: Desclee & Cie, 1968).
Ovide moralisé: 'Ovide moralisé': Poème du commencement du quatorzième siècle, publié d'après tous les manuscrits connus, ed. C. de Boer, 5 vols. (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1915–38).

List of abbreviations

- Religieux: Le Religieux de St Denis: Chronique de Charles VI*, ed. L. F. Bellaguet, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de la France, série 1, 6 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1839–52).
- Rose: Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, 3 vols., Classiques Français du Moyen Age (Paris: Champion, 1965–70).
- Three Medieval Views: Three Medieval Views of Women: 'La Contenance des fames', 'Le Bien des fames', 'Le Blasme des fames'*, ed. and trans. Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer and Mathé Allain (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989).
- Vieil pelerin: Philippe de Mézières, Le Songe du vieil pelerin of Philippe de Mézières, Chancellor of Cyprus*, ed. G. W. Coopland, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1969).
- Woman Defamed: Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

SECONDARY SOURCES ON THE WORKS OF CHRISTINE DE PIZAN

- Bornstein, *Ideals: Ideals for Women in the Works of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Diane Bornstein, Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, ed. Guy R. Mermier and Edelgard E. DuBruck, 1 (Michigan Consortium for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 1981).
- Brabant, *Politics: Politics, Gender and Genre: The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margaret Brabant (Boulder, Colorado/Oxford: Westview Press, 1992).
- Delany, “‘Mothers’”: Sheila Delany, “‘Mothers to think back through’: Who are they? The ambiguous case of Christine de Pizan”, in her *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester University Press, 1990), 88–103.
- Dulac and Ribémont, *Une Femme: Une femme de Lettres au Moyen Age: Etudes réunies autour de Christine de Pizan*, ed. Liliane Dulac and Bernard Ribémont (Orleans: Paradigme, 1995).
- Kennedy, *Guide: Angus J. Kennedy, Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographical Guide* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1984).
- Kennedy, *Supplement: Angus J. Kennedy, Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographical Guide: Supplement I* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1994).
- Ribémont, *Sur le chemin: Sur le chemin de longue étude . . . Actes du colloque d'Orléans juillet 1995*, ed. Bernard Ribémont, Etudes christiniennes, 3 (Paris: Champion, 1998).
- Richards *Reinterpreting: Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, ed. Earl Jeffrey Richards et al. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992).
- Schibanoff, ‘Taking the gold’: Susan Schibanoff, ‘Taking the gold out of Egypt: the art of reading as a woman’, in Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds., *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers*,

List of abbreviations

- Texts and Contexts* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 83–106.
- Willard, *Life*: Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984).
- Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City: The City of Scholars: New Approaches to Christine de Pizan*, ed. Margarete Zimmermann and Dina De Rentiis, *European Cultures: Studies in Literature and the Arts*, 2 (New York/Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994).

Introduction

Since its inception, feminist literary scholarship has had two main goals: first, to challenge what it sees as the marginalisation of women's experience typical of the works of the male-authored canon; and secondly, to construct an alternative genealogy of female writers. For many modern critics, whether medieval specialists or not,¹ Christine de Pizan (1364–1430?), is eminently suitable for inclusion in this genealogy by virtue of being France's 'first professional woman of letters'.² Despite the best efforts of some nineteenth-century scholars to dismiss her as a tedious blue-stocking,³ Christine's place in the history of French medieval literature, alongside Chrétien de Troyes, Guillaume de Machaut and Jean Froissart, now seems to be fully secure.⁴ Born in Italy, but brought to live at the Parisian court of King Charles V at the age of four by her father, Tommaso da Pizzano (Thomas de Pizan), Christine became a key figure in the social, intellectual and political milieux of early fifteenth-century France.⁵ Her works encompass a wide range of

¹ See Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours*, 2 vols. (Paris: des Femmes, 1977), 53–67; and Léon Abensour, *Histoire générale du féminisme* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979), 135–9.

² See Leslie Altman, 'Christine de Pizan: first professional woman of letters (1364–1430?)', in Jeanie R. Brink, ed., *Female Scholars: A Tradition of Learned Women before 1800* (Montreal: Eden Women's Publications, 1980), 7–23. See also Susan Groag Bell, 'Christine de Pizan (1364–1430): humanism and the problem of a studious woman', *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976), 173–84.

³ See Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la littérature française* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1898), 162–3. See also Kennedy, *Supplement*, item 529.

⁴ See Kennedy, *Guide*; Kennedy, 'A selective bibliography of Christine de Pizan scholarship, circa 1980–87', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 285–98; and Kennedy, *Supplement*. See also Edith Yenal, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliography of Writings by Her and About Her*, Scarecrow Author Bibliographies, no.63 (Metuchen, NJ/London: Scarecrow Press, 1989), second edition.

⁵ See Marie-Josèphe Pinet, *Christine de Pisan 1364–1430: étude biographique et littéraire*, Bibliothèque du XVe Siècle, 35 (Paris: Champion, 1927); Enid McLeod, *The Order of the Rose*:

genres, from literary debates to courtesy manuals, from lyric poetry to treatises on chivalry, and from biographies of kings to books of pious devotion. However, Christine has been ranked in this genealogy of female authors not just because she achieved eminence in her own time but also because modern scholars have hailed her as the first woman to attack the medieval tradition of clerkly misogyny for its portrayal of the female sex as intrinsically sinful and immoral.

Yet despite this revival of interest in Christine (due largely to feminist scholarship), critics are by no means agreed on her exact status in the history of feminism itself. Those who have offered an assessment of her defence of women have tended to adopt one of two contrasting positions: whilst some have praised Christine for challenging the dominant misogynist ideology of her age, even lauding her ability to anticipate key tenets of post-structuralist feminist theory,⁶ others have castigated her for failing to advocate reform of the social order or to demand equal rights for women.⁷ Yet these wildly divergent assessments of Christine's work can be faulted on common grounds: both ignore her original cultural context and judge her by criteria which are fundamentally anachronistic. Positive or negative, such judgments tell us more about what modern feminists might wish Christine to have achieved, as opposed to what she herself sought to achieve in her campaign to champion the cause of women.

Rather than offering an overview of her feminism, one alternative approach to studying Christine's critique of misogyny has been to concentrate on her representation of women in specific texts. Scholars working in this vein have been far more attentive to Christine's own historical and intellectual context and, in particular, to the way she transformed her source material in order to provide images of women capable of countering those made familiar by the misogynist tradition. This approach has produced much fine scholar-

The Life and Ideas of Christine de Pizan (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976); Régine Pernoud, *Christine de Pisan* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1982); Willard, *Life*.

⁶ See, for example, Lynne Huffer, 'Christine de Pisan: speaking like a woman/speaking like a man', in Edelgard E. DuBruck, ed., *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays toward a Cultural Anthropology*, Medieval Studies, 1 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 61–72; Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁷ See Delany, "'Mothers'".

ship, but even here there has been a tendency for critics to take the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Christine's best-known work, as the yardstick by which to evaluate her defence of women, and to conclude that, by comparison, her other texts are disappointingly conservative.⁸ The *Epistre Othéa*, for example, has been criticised as a work which colludes with misogynist exegetical practice,⁹ whilst the *Livre des Trois Vertus* has frequently been attacked for its acceptance of a social status quo which relegated women to the rank of second-class citizens.¹⁰

In this present study, my aim is not to portray Christine's works in defence of women as failed versions of the *Cité* but rather to see this text as one part of a much wider project. I shall, therefore, neither condemn Christine for being a reactionary nor, alternatively, assume that she is necessarily radical or subversive simply by virtue of being a female author. Instead, my purpose is to show that Christine's choice of literary and rhetorical strategies with which to counter misogyny was defined by a culture profoundly different from our own. In common with her late medieval male contemporaries, Christine saw her role as author as principally that of a teacher or advisor whose task was to provide her readers with much-needed lessons in ethics and morality.¹¹ It is this emphasis on ethics, rather than simply a desire to provide positive images of female characters, that gives Christine's works in defence of women a far greater unity than has often previously been thought. Her feminism should thus be seen as based on a broader moral vision, one which refused to see virtue as an exclusively male preserve and which sought to prove that both sexes were capable of pursuing the universal goal of moral self-edification. However, Christine relates this ethical perspective to her ideas on gender in a variety of ways, depending on the genre in which she is writing. In particular, she modifies her defence of women according to her audience, since she makes a clear distinction between the precise needs of her male

⁸ See the list of abbreviations above for full details of primary texts by Christine and other medieval writers and secondary works most frequently cited.

⁹ See Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold'.

¹⁰ See Delany, "'Mothers'"; and Roberta L. Krueger, 'A woman's response: Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans* and the limits of romance', in her *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 217–46.

¹¹ See Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (University of Toronto Press, 1982).

and female readerships. We thus need to analyse what her specific didactic purpose was in any given text, for example whether her primary aim was to criticise male writers' use of allegory for misogynist ends or to celebrate women's achievements. Moreover, rather than seeing Christine as a marginal figure who stood outside contemporary culture, we have to examine how she drew on many of the historical, philosophical and theological sources traditionally cited by anti-feminist writers, yet managed to put these sources to novel uses of her own.¹²

The choice of the texts which form the basis of this study was determined by two main criteria. First, all were written between 1399 and 1405, a key period in Christine's literary production which marked the transition between her early lyric poetry, written for the amusement of the Valois court, and her later political and pious works, composed in response to particular events such as the struggle between Armagnacs and Burgundians, or the battle of Agincourt.¹³ Critics have frequently discussed Christine's last known work, the *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc* (1429), in the context of her defence of women.¹⁴ However, I shall not be considering the *Ditié* here since, as I have argued elsewhere,¹⁵ Christine's text represents Joan as a miraculous figure, one whose exceptional abilities function to create cohesion in the French body politic, rather than (as some scholars have claimed) a 'feminist exemplum' whose deeds constitute the ultimate refutation of misogynist slander.¹⁶ Secondly, the texts I have chosen for study are all prose works (or, in the case of the *Othéa*, which does contain short verse passages, mainly in prose). This is because Christine generally respects the traditional distinction in medieval literature between prose and verse according to which

¹² For a similar view of Christine's debt to previous intellectual and cultural resources, see Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

¹³ However, it is important not to over-simplify this periodisation of Christine's works, since the period 1400–5 also saw the production of verse romances such as the *Livre du Duc des vrais amans* and political works such as the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*.

¹⁴ For an edition of this text, see Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty, eds. and trans., *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*, Medium Aevum Monographs, New Series IX (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1977).

¹⁵ Rosalind Brown-Grant: "'Hee! Quel honneur au femenin sexe!': Female heroism in Christine de Pizan's *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*", *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* 5 (1997), 123–33.

¹⁶ See Alan P. Barr, 'Christine de Pisan's *Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*: A feminist exemplum for the Querelle des femmes', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 14 (1988), 1–12; and Edith Joyce Benkov, 'The coming to writing: *auctoritas* and authority in Christine de Pizan', *Le Moyen Français* 35–6 (1994–5), 33–48.

prose is reserved for works of a more serious nature, such as historiography or biblical exegesis.¹⁷ I have thus largely excluded from my discussion two of Christine's poetic works which fall into the period indicated above: the *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* (1399) and the *Dit de la Rose* (1402).¹⁸ Though these texts have an undeniably polemical quality, they were mainly written as 'poésie de circonstance' and offer a far less sustained critique of misogyny than that contained in Christine's works in prose.

The five works are discussed below in the following order: the 'querelle de la *Rose*' (1401–2); the *Othéa* (1399–1400), the *Avison-Christine* (end of 1405); the *Cité* (1405); and the *Trois Vertus* (1405). Although not strictly chronological, this sequence of discussion allows us to begin by examining the theoretical underpinning of Christine's attack on anti-feminism as explicitly set out in the 'querelle', before proceeding to analyse how these ideas inform her defence of women in her other texts. Chapter One shows how Christine's intervention in the famous literary debate on the *Rose* establishes the moral basis of her critique of misogyny, which she condemns both as a doctrine and as a literary practice. The next two chapters of this study explore how Christine delivers this anti-misogynist message to her male readers. Chapter Two demonstrates that in the *Othéa*, a courtesy book written in epistolary form for a princely readership, Christine not only provides an alternative to the negative representations of love and women offered in allegorical works such as the *Rose*, but also challenges the way in which they exploit the Ovidian, mythological tradition in order to slander the female sex. Chapter Three argues that the *Avison*, which critics have usually read simply as an autobiographical account of how Christine first became a professional woman writer, is in fact a 'mirror for princes' in which she seeks to legitimate herself in her role as the bearer of an important political message for France's rulers. The autobiographical elements of Christine's text thus allow her to make capital out of her lowly social status as a woman in order to propose herself as a Boethian model of moral consolation and ethical instruction for the princely reader.

Having discussed how Christine encourages her male readership to accept the authority of women as exemplars of moral truths, the

¹⁷ See Michel Zink, *Littérature française du Moyen Âge* (Paris: PUF, 1992), 175–80.

¹⁸ For an edition of these texts, see *Dieu d'Amours*.

final two chapters of this study are devoted to works in which she turns her attention to her female readers, whom she saw as being in need of comfort and protection from the assaults launched on women by the anti-feminist tradition. Chapter Four examines how in the *Cité* Christine contributes to, and simultaneously transforms, the biographical catalogue genre of 'the lives of famous men and women', using the great achievements of heroines of the past to counter misogynist stereotypes and inspire her contemporaries to the pursuit of virtue. Finally, Chapter Five argues that, contrary to previous critical opinion, Christine's courtesy book for women, the *Trois Vertus*, does not betray, but rather perpetuates, the ideals of the *Cité* and presents its female readers with both a 'mirror' for their spiritual instruction and practical advice on how to construct a reputation for themselves which will confound misogynist opinion forever.

Whether writing didactic manuals for knights and princes or offering pragmatic advice to ladies and princesses, Christine was unwavering in her desire to convince her readers of the equality of the two sexes in moral, if not social, terms. Because of this aim, she was crucially concerned with the issue of women's moral representation in literature, an issue that she was to address most directly in the 'querelle de la *Rose*'. It is with this complex and highly polemical work that our study of Christine de Pizan's defence of women begins.

CHAPTER I

The ‘querelle de la “Rose”’: Christine’s critique of misogynist doctrine and literary practice

In order to undertake a defence of women against the misogynist tradition and to construct an authoritative discursive position from which to mount such a defence, Christine de Pizan first had to take a stand against the text which, by end of the fourteenth century, had firmly established itself as the vernacular authority on misogyny: Jean de Meung’s *Rose*.¹ Christine’s temerity in attacking this authoritative text can be measured by the fact that up until the time of the debate which she was to instigate, assessments of Jean’s great erudition and knowledge in matters both amatory and philosophical had been overwhelmingly favourable.² She had already begun to engage directly with this text in 1399 in an earlier poetic work, the *Dieu d’Amours*, as well as indirectly in 1400 in the *Othéa*. However, it was only in 1401 that she became involved in a highly polemical exchange of letters with notable intellectual figures of her day on the question of the *Rose*.³ This exchange, generally referred to as the

¹ Armand Strubel, the most recent translator of the *Rose* into modern French, states that ‘les lecteurs médiévaux l’utilisent comme un inépuisable recueil de sentences sur l’amour et les femmes’: see Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Armand Strubel, ed. and trans., Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992), 5. However, for a different assessment of the misogyny of the *Rose*, see Lionel J. Friedman, ‘“Jean de Meung”, anti-feminism, and “bourgeois realism”’, *Modern Philology* 57,1 (1959), 13–23.

² See John V. Fleming, ‘The moral reputation of the *Roman de la Rose* before 1400’, *Romance Philology* 18 (1964–5), 430–5; Pierre-Yves Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose au XIV^e siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1980); Jillian M. Hill, *The Medieval Debate on Jean de Meung’s Roman de la Rose: Morality versus Art*, Studies in Medieval Literature, 4 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991). See also Sylvia J. Huot, ‘Medieval readers of the *Roman de la Rose*: the evidence of marginal notations’, *Romance Philology* 43,3 (1990), 400–20; and Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³ All page references in this chapter are to *Débat*, unless otherwise stated. For a modern English translation of the ‘querelle’ documents, see Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, ed. and trans., *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 199 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Department of Romance Languages, 1978), hereafter referred to as *La Querelle*.

'querelle de la *Rose*', ultimately turned out to be the first phase of a broader tradition of literary debates on women, known as the 'querelle des femmes', which extended into the Renaissance.⁴

The 'querelle' itself was in two distinct phases, the first beginning with a treatise written in 1401 in favour of the *Rose* by Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille, and the second being initiated in 1402 by Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, who wrote a dream-vision in which the author of the *Rose* is arraigned in the court of Christianity by the allegorical figure of Eloquence Theologienne, who acts as Gerson's mouthpiece.⁵ Christine's own intervention was limited, in the first phase, to a critical reply to Jean de Montreuil's original treatise and a sharp response to Gontier Col, First Secretary and Notary to King Charles VI, who was brought in by his friend Jean to bolster his case. In the second phase, Christine's role was to offer a lengthy condemnation of the views of Gontier's brother, Pierre, Canon of Paris and Tournay, who was also asked by Jean to intervene in the affair to defend the *Rose* against the attacks of both Christine and Gerson. At the end of each of these two phases it was Christine who published the documents in the form of dossiers, although in both cases her opponents' views were partially omitted. Modern scholars have therefore had to reconstitute the full complement of documents pertaining to the 'querelle' by using manuscripts which contain the material left out by Christine, though Jean de Montreuil's original treatise has never been recovered.⁶

Modern scholarship of the debate has, at times, threatened to

⁴ See Lula McDowell Richardson, *The Forerunners of Feminism in French Literature of the Renaissance, From Christine of Pisa to Marie de Gournay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929); Blanche Hinman Dow, *The Varying Attitude toward Women in French Literature of the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1936); Emile Telle, *L'Œuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre et la querelle des femmes* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969); Joan Kelly, 'Early feminist theory and the *Querelle des femmes*, 1400–1789', *Signs* 8 (1982), 4–28. See also Helen Fletcher Moody, 'The Debate of the Rose: The "Querelle des Femmes" as Court Poetry' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1981); Madeleine Lazard, *Images littéraires de la femme à la Renaissance*, *Littératures Modernes*, 39 (Paris: PUF, 1985), 9–16; Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵ On the humanist context of the 'querelle', see Gilbert Ouy, 'Paris l'un des principaux foyers de l'humanisme en Europe au début du XVe siècle', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France* (1967–8 [1970]), 71–98; and Nadia Margolis, '“The cry of the chameleon”: evolving voices in the Epistles of Christine de Pizan', *Disputatio* 1 (1996), 37–70.

⁶ For a full chronology and detailed description of the 'querelle' documents, see *Débat*, intro.; and Eric Hicks and Ezio Ornato, 'Jean de Montreuil et le débat sur le *Roman de la Rose*', *Romania* 98 (1977), 34–64, 186–219.

become more of a 'querelle de Christine' than an analysis of the 'querelle' documents themselves.⁷ The patristic critics D.W. Robertson and John V. Fleming, whose view of the *Rose* as a moral attack on foolish love was at odds with that of Christine, were the first to accuse her of prudishness in '[refusing] to admit the efficacy of any allegorical work which was not sufficiently pious on the surface to be fit for the ears of children'.⁸ The translators of the debate into modern English, Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, have attempted to defend Christine against patristic attack, by stressing that both sides of the debate raise key literary and moral issues such as, for example, Jean de Meung's delegation of responsibility to his characters for putting forward misogynist views.⁹ However, despite this nuanced assessment, the Marxist critic Sheila Delany has more recently condemned Christine's role in the 'querelle' as part of a broader attack on her political conservatism.¹⁰ In addition to the familiar charge of prudishness,¹¹ Delany goes on to berate Christine for insisting that authors should take full responsibility for the views expressed in their texts, for condemning Jean de Meung's radical view of unmarried love, and for accusing him of

⁷ For a full bibliography of the early scholarship on the 'querelle', see Kennedy, *Guide*, items 364–9. See also Peter Potansky, *Der Streit um den Rosenroman*, Münchener Romanistische Arbeiten, Heft XXXIII (Munich: Fink, 1972); G. C. Furr, 'The Quarrel of the *Roman de la Rose* and Fourteenth Century Humanism' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1979); Karl August Ott, *Der Rosenroman*, Erträge der Forschung, 145 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980); Moody, 'The Debate'; Maxwell Luria, *A Reader's Guide to the 'Roman de la Rose'* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982); Armand Strubel, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Etudes Littéraires, 4 (Paris: PUF, 1984), 112–17; Heather M. Arden, *The Romance of the Rose*, Twayne's World Author Series, 791 (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Karen Sullivan, 'At the limit of feminist theory: an architectonics of the *Querelle de la Rose*', *Exemplaria* 3,2 (1991), 435–65; Margarete Zimmermann, 'Wirres Zeug und übles Geschwätz': Christine über den Rosenroman (Bad Nauheim: Rosenmuseum Steinfurth, 1993); Eric Hicks, 'Situation du débat sur le *Roman de la Rose*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 51–67; Helen Solterer, 'Flaming words: verbal violence and gender in premodern Paris', *Romanic Review* 86,2 (1995), 355–78; and Karen Sullivan, 'The inquisitorial origins of literary debate', *Romanic Review* 88,3 (1997), 27–51.

⁸ D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 361. See also Fleming, 'The moral reputation'; and Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton University Press, 1969).

⁹ See Joseph L. Baird and John R. Kane, 'La Querelle de la Rose: in defense of the opponents', *The French Review* 48 (1974–5), 298–307.

¹⁰ Delany, '"Mothers"'.¹¹

¹¹ See also David F. Hult, 'Words and deeds: Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose* and the hermeneutics of censorship', *New Literary History* 28,2 (1997), 345–66, who likens Christine's stance as literary censor to that of contemporary anti-pornography campaigners such as Catherine MacKinnon.

slandering the female sex whilst ignoring the examples of virtuous women to be found in his work.¹² Here I shall argue that what Delany treats as four separate issues in the ‘querelle’, namely language, authorial responsibility, love and anti-feminism, are in fact unified by Christine’s ethical outlook which is the basis of her defence of womankind. In tackling the questions of anti-feminism and love in the *Rose*, Christine asserts that Jean de Meung’s negative representation of women leads to disharmony between the sexes and thus to immoral and un-Christian behaviour. On the matters of authorial responsibility and language, Christine’s views are, in general, typical of her age in their emphasis on the writer’s role as moral reformer, whose function is to impart ethical instruction to the reader.¹³ Moreover, an understanding of how, in the ‘querelle de la *Rose*’, Christine relates Jean de Meung’s misogynist doctrine to his immoral literary practice is the key to understanding both her position on misogyny in her later texts such as the *Cité*, and the theoretical and rhetorical underpinning of Christine’s own literary practice as moral writer.¹⁴ This chapter will therefore discuss first, Christine’s critique of the anti-feminism of both Jean de Meung and her own opponents in the ‘querelle’, and secondly her analysis of Jean’s literary practice. Since this latter issue, rather than the misogyny of the *Rose*, was also the chief target of Jean Gerson, Christine’s ally in the debate, his contribution will be discussed below in the second half of this chapter.

ANTI-FEMINISM IN THE FIRING LINE

Although Christine was a vociferous antagonist in the debate, criticising both Jean de Montreuil and Pierre Col for their views, it is significant that, in her letters, she presents *herself* as the one who is under attack from her opponents even though, for Jean and the Col brothers, it was they who were on the defensive in having to ward off

¹² See Christine M. Reno, ‘Christine de Pizan: “at best a contradictory figure?”’, in Brabant, *Politics*, 171–92; and Sheila Delany, ‘History, politics, and Christine studies: a polemical reply’, *ibid.*, 193–206.

¹³ See Claude Gauvard, ‘Christine de Pizan et ses contemporains: l’engagement politique des écrivains dans le royaume de France aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles’, in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 105–28.

¹⁴ See Kevin Brownlee, ‘Discourses of the self: Christine de Pizan and the *Rose*’, *Romanic Review* 59 (1988), 213–21.

negative criticisms of the *Rose*. As we shall see, her strategy in the ‘querelle’ is to shift the grounds of the debate in order to show how the behaviour and language of Jean de Meung’s defenders have been affected by the pernicious influence of his text, a work which she deemed to have ‘empoisonney plusieurs cuers humains’ (118, line 119), including those of her opponents in the ‘querelle’. Christine therefore transforms the debate from an exchange of views about a particular literary text into a rhetorical ‘battle’ (as she puts it) between the two sexes, a battle which, for her, closely parallels that in Jean’s text between the attacking Amant and the defensive Rose. In so doing, Christine uses the debate as a platform from which to identify and refute both the misogynist views propounded in the *Rose* and those of her antagonists themselves, particularly Pierre Col, whom she accuses of even outdoing his master in denigrating women.

Misogyny in the ‘Rose’: men, women and love

Christine’s critique of what she regards as Jean’s misogyny centres on two key issues which, in general, correspond to the first and second phases of the ‘querelle’ respectively. In her letters to Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col, Christine sets out her objections to the views of women presented by various characters in the *Rose*. In the second phase, in a more lengthy reply to Pierre Col, Christine briefly reiterates these views but expounds more fully on the dangerous consequences of misogynist thought for love between man and woman. For Christine, these two issues, the representations of women and love between the sexes, are inextricably linked because both raise important moral questions. This is made clear from the dedication to Queen Isabeau de Bavière in the first dossier of documents, where Christine explains that she has been moved to take a stand against ‘aucunes oppinions a honnesteté contraires, et aussi l’onneur et louenge des femmes (laquelle pluseurs clerks et autres se sont efforciez par leurs dittiez d’amenuisier, qui n’est chose loisible ne a souffrir ne soustenir)’ (6, lines 28–31). Christine binds the issue of misogyny to that of morality (‘honnesteté’) by arguing that Jean’s view of love is contaminated by his negative conception of the female sex, which, to her mind, can ultimately only lead to the moral perdition of both sexes.

In the course of her reply to Jean de Montreuil’s treatise on the

Rose, Christine outlines her points of disagreement with his more favourable view of the text. She declares her shock at reading pernicious words and doctrine from the mouths of its two female characters, Raison and La Vieille, expressing her disgust at the uncouth language of the former, 'laquelle nomme les secréz membres plainement par nom' (13, lines 61–2), and the dangerous incitements to young women on the part of the latter, 'qui y pourra noter fors ennortemens sophistez tous plains de laidure et toute vilaine memoire?' (15, lines 110–11).¹⁵ However, Christine reserves most of her criticisms for the misogynist speeches of the Jaloux and Genius. She mocks the supposed usefulness of the Jaloux's teachings, his 'faintises, faulx semblans et choses dissimulees en mariage et autre estat' (ibid., lines 127–8), and dismisses his outpourings as those of a character of limited authority in the text who merely makes pronouncements in a stereotypically misogamous fashion (ibid., lines 117–20).

Genius, on the other hand, is a more authoritative figure in the *Rose* and as such is severely attacked by Christine in the following terms: 'si excessivement, impettueusement et tres nonveritablement il accuse, blasme et diffame femmes de pluseurs tres grans vices et leurs meurs tesmoingne estre plains de toute perversité' (16, lines 163–6). She argues that Genius' view of women is untenable since his advice to men is contradictory. Whilst exhorting the male relentlessly to pursue the female for procreative purposes, Genius nevertheless also recommends that women should be avoided at all costs: "'fuiéz! fuiéz! fuiéz le serpent venimeux'" (17, lines 173–4). Christine thus unravels the logic of Genius' argument the better to reject it, arguing that for his teachings to have had any hope of proving useful, he should have remained consistent (ibid., lines 178–9). In order to refute Genius' other opinion that men should refrain from telling their secrets to women, Christine rhetorically conjectures what proof there is of the dire consequences befalling men as a result of this action: 'quans ont veuz accuséz, mors, pendus ou reprouchiéz en rue par l'encusement de leurs femmes: si croy que cler les trouveront seméz' (ibid., lines 185–7). Furthermore, in order to undermine Genius' argument that untrustworthiness in love is a feminine trait, Christine declares that such a failing should be

¹⁵ Despite the generally favourable assessment of the *Rose* prior to the 'querelle', Christine was not the first reader to take issue with its representation of these two female characters: see Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 135–206; and Hill, *The Medieval Debate*, 1–25.

condemned wherever it is to be found, whether in man *or* woman. Finally, to cast complete doubt on the validity of Genius' teachings, Christine shows how his misogynist logic seeks to shift responsibility for men's actions on to women.¹⁶ In an ironic reversal of the behaviour of Amant towards the Rose, Christine demands to know whether all men's suffering has come about because they have been pursued and harried by women: 'Te vont elles en ton hostel querir, prier et prendre a force? Bon seroit savoir comment elles te deçoivent' (18, lines 205–7).

Christine then turns her attention to what she sees as one of the most insidious aspects of misogynist thought: the tendency to generalise and condemn a whole sex on the basis of a few particular examples.¹⁷ She shows how, when criticising wives, this tendency to generalise from the particular can have the especially harmful consequence of undermining the sacrament of marriage itself. Thus, to her mind, the *Rose* is invalidated as a possible useful source of teaching because of its lack of discrimination: 'Et se seulement eust blasmé les deshonestes et conseillé elles fuir, bon enseignement et juste seroit. Mais non! ains sans exception toutes les accuse' (ibid., lines 221–4). In order to emphasise the futility and dishonesty of misogynist generalisations, Christine cites numerous counter-examples of virtuous married women whose actions have directly benefited their husbands. Just as she will do later in the *Cité*, Christine adduces examples not only from the Bible and ancient history (Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, etc.) but also from the recent French past ('la sainte devote royne, Jehanne', 19, line 242) and even contemporary society ('la duchesse d'Anjou qui ore est nommee royne de Secile', (ibid., lines 243–4).

For Christine, the logical outcome of misogyny in works such as the *Rose* is, in effect, to present women as a race apart from men, a race which is less than human.¹⁸ Pointing out the similarity of approach in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Jean de Meung's *Rose*, a

¹⁶ This manoeuvre is a commonplace in misogynist literature. John Gower is an unusual example of a male medieval writer who lays the blame for men's lust squarely on the men themselves: see *Confessio Amantis*, Book VII, lines 4273–310.

¹⁷ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 1–15; and *Three Medieval Views*, 1–27. See also Katherine Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); R. Howard Bloch, 'Medieval misogyny', *Representations* 20 (1987), 1–24; and Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

¹⁸ See Sullivan, 'At the limit', 454; and Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 1.

similarity which only serves to condemn the latter still further, Christine deplores the conception of women which such texts would seem to uphold, since the methods for conquering the female sex which they espouse are so extreme: 'Qui sont fames? Qui sont elles? Sont ce serpens, loups, lyons, dragons, guievres ou bestes ravissables devourans et ennemies a nature humaine, qu'il conviengne fere art a les decepvoir et prandre?' (139, lines 775–8). The reference here to serpents clearly recalls Genius' advice to flee venomous women as if they were snakes, but, coupled here with the allusion to 'ennemies a nature humaine', Christine uses it to imply that the *Rose* conceives 'human nature' to be male rather than something which is common to both sexes. This conception of women as in some sense non-human constitutes a key point of misogynist doctrine which Christine will contest throughout her later writings in defence of women.¹⁹ Here she attacks this view by stressing immediately the essential similarity of male and female nature: 'Et par Dieu, si sont elles vos meres, vos suers, vos filles, vos fammes et vos amies; elles sont vous mesmes et vous meesmes elles' (ibid., lines 781–3). Thus she undermines the misogyny of the *Rose* by highlighting what she sees as its contradictory logic, countering its penchant for unjustified negative generalisations, and repudiating its attempt to classify female nature as essentially non-human.

For Christine, Jean de Meung's opinion of women as 'serpens, loups, lyons etc.' forms, in turn, the basis of his somewhat contradictory view of love. This view presents the female sex to the male as an object which is simultaneously both desirable and terrifying, a source of both attraction and dread. However, Christine does not simply content herself with diagnosing Jean's faulty logic. Rather, she aims to show that his view of love, which arises directly from his contradictory view of women, is both un-Christian and immoral, so stressing the heterodox nature of two key teachings of his text.²⁰ How then, according to Christine, does Jean's view of women inform his treatment of love in the *Rose*? Why should she claim that this representation of women is deleterious to the moral well-being of both sexes?

In her reply to Jean de Montreuil, Christine inveighs against the

¹⁹ See, for example, Richard de Bury's fourteenth-century description of woman as a 'two-legged animal' in his *Philobiblon*, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 1.

²⁰ However, see Charles Dahlberg, 'Love and the *Roman de la Rose*', *Speculum* 44 (1969), 568–84.

harmful proverbial words uttered by Raison that "en la guerre amoureuse . . . vault mieulx decevoir que deceuz estre" (14, lines 99–100). As a means to an end, the practice of deception is, as Christine points out, contrary to Christian precepts: 'la Raison maistre Jehan de Meung renia son Pere a cellui mot, car trop donna autre doctrine' (ibid., lines 100–2). She returns to this point at greater length in the second phase of the 'querelle', citing the example of the story of Troy to illustrate the disastrous effects of deception in general.²¹ Within the realm of love, such a practice is all the more to be condemned for its immorality: 'car selonc la justice de Dieu celluy est plus pugniz qui injurie autrui que celluy qui est injuriés (et disons encore mesmement en cas d'amours pour ce que la Raison maistre Jehan de Meung dist que "Mieulx vaut" etc.)' (128, lines 432–6).

Just as Christine cites examples of virtuous women to counter misogynist generalisations, so she proposes an alternative form of love between men and women in which deception need play no part. Invoking the example of her own son, Christine declares that she would prefer him to love one good woman than to sin by deceiving several: 'Je ay ung seul filz . . . mais je ameroye mieulx qu'il fust parfaitement amoureux avec le scens que je espore que Dieu luy donra, come ont homes raisonnables, d'une fame bien condicionnee et sage qui amast honneur . . . que je ne seroie qu'a son pouoir fut decepveur de toutes ou de plusieurs' (128–9, lines 437–44). The key words here are the lover's good sense, his reason, and his choice of a wise and virtuous lady since, for Christine, love ought to be based on honour, respect and, above all, the desire for a worthy object (129, lines 453–5).²² It is up to the lover to find an honourable woman to love rather than blaming all women should one of them fail to meet his expectations. Christine's view firmly refutes the misogynist tendency to lay responsibility for male chastity on to women, a view which is fundamental for her defence of the female sex, particularly in the *Othéa* where this teaching is delivered to the princely reader.

Instead of being condemned either to deceive or to be deceived,

²¹ Christine uses the example of Troy to illustrate this point at greater length in both the *Dieu d'Amours*, lines 536–40, and, of course, the *Othéa*.

²² See June Hall McCash, 'Mutual love as a medieval ideal', in Keith Busby and Erik Kooper, eds., *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context (Selected Papers from the Fifth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Dalfsen, The Netherlands, 9–16 Aug., 1986)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 429–38.

the lover, according to Christine, can be ennobled by his love, provided that his sole motive is not simply to obtain sexual satisfaction, as would seem to be the case in the *Rose*: 'plusseurs ont amey loyaument et parfaitement qui onques n'y couchierent, ne onques ne deseurent ne furent deceu, de qui estoit principale entencion que leurs meurs en vauçissent mieulx, – et pour celle amour devenoyent vaillans et bien renommés, et tant que en leur viellesce ilz louoient Dieu qu'ilz avoient esté amoureux' (ibid., lines 458–64).²³ In conclusion, Christine offers a proverbial sentence to refute Raison's dictum, 'c'est pis decevoir que estre bien amoureux, et pis en puet venir' (130, lines 482–3), thus subverting Raison's view which, to her mind, condemns a lover to immoral acts towards women and leads him away from God.

If Christine attacks Raison's exhortation to deception in love, she abhors Genius' sermon which proclaims the desired end of love to be sexual intercourse in the interests of perpetuation of the species.²⁴ For Christine, not only does Genius commit the sacrilege of expressing the sacred ('paradis et les joyes qui la sont', 16, lines 147–8) in terms of the profane ('les euvres de Nature', ibid., line 150), he even seems to go so far as to propound lust as a virtue for both man and woman: 'Et par ce semble que maintenir vueille le pechié de luxure estre nul, ains vertu – qui est erreur et contre la loy de Dieu' (ibid., lines 152–4). She states that Genius is to be condemned for his failure to uphold the orthodox Augustinian notion that marriage is the only form of relationship in which sexual relations can be sanctioned. Indeed, his fault is compounded even further by the fact that, in her view, his relentless attacks on the faithless behaviour of wives towards their husbands can only lead to revulsion for the married state on the part of men, thus destroying their wish to procreate within it (144, lines 939–41).

For Christine, Jean's contorted view of love, based on an erroneous and misguided conception of the female sex, can only undermine good relations between the sexes and weaken the sacrament of marriage, the one institution in which physical desires can be

²³ See Willard, *Life*, 61.

²⁴ However, see Alan M. F. Gunn, *The Mirror of Love: A Reinterpretation of the Romance of the Rose* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Technical Press, 1952). See also George D. Economou, 'The character Genius in Alan de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower', *Chaucer Review* 4 (1970), 203–10.

expressed without endangering the human soul. In her later works in defence of women, particularly the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus*, Christine will tackle both of these misconceptions at once, offering examples of women as chaste and faithful wives whose virtuous actions brought countless benefits to their husbands.

Defending the indefensible? Misogyny in the 'querelle'

In her contributions to the debate, Christine not only attacked Jean de Meung's misogyny but also extended her critique to include the attitudes of his defenders as well. Central to her argument is the idea that the disciples of the *Rose* are themselves victims of its seductive, yet poisonous charms, which she frequently refers to as 'venin' mixed with 'miel' (see, for example, 145, lines 968–9). How then did Christine represent each side's role in the 'querelle'? What type of misogynist arguments did she deem her opponents to have marshalled against both her and other women? How did she combat each of these sets of arguments in turn?

Although in their letters it is clear that Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col felt themselves to be under attack from a disgruntled female reader of the *Rose*, the dedications added by Christine to copies of the first dossier of documents which were given to Queen Isabeau de Bavière and Guillaume de Tignonville create precisely the opposite impression.²⁵ From being a debate centring on the defence of the *Rose*, the 'querelle' becomes the site of an energetic battle in defence of the female sex, an important reversal brought about by Christine herself. In her dedications, Christine is careful to construct herself as the injured and weaker party pitted against more skilful opponents.²⁶ To the queen, she explains how she has compiled the dossier in order to champion the female sex whilst also underlining the difficulty of this endeavour, since she is merely a

²⁵ See Hicks and Ornato, 'Jean de Montreuil', 214, who note that 'le rôle de Christine dans l'affaire ne fut pas, comme elle aimait à le faire croire, celui de la victime constamment et injustement attaquée. Ce fut elle, au contraire, qui relança le débat, alors que Montreuil et Gontier Col auraient préféré l'étouffer.'

²⁶ For Christine's frequent use of this strategy in her writings, see Jacqueline Cerquiglini, 'L'Etrangère', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 239–52; Joël Blanchard, 'Compilation et légitimation au XVe siècle', *Poétique* 19 (1988), 139–57; Mary McKinley, 'The subversive "seulette"', in Brabant, *Politics*, 157–70; and Nadia Margolis, 'Elegant closures: the use of the diminutive in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Meun', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 111–23.

woman whereas her adversaries are eloquent scholars, 'soubtilz maistres' (6, lines 32–3). However, though weak in might, she presents herself as strong in right, for the main weapon in her hands is the knowledge that she is acting out of 'certaine science' (ibid., line 34). To Tignonville, Christine stresses less the subject of the 'querelle', which she merely designates as 'oppinions contraires' (7, line 10), than the difficulty of her position: 'Pour ce requier vous, tres sçavant, que par compassion de ma femmenine ignorance, vostre humblece s'encline a joindre a mes dictes vraies oppinions par si que vostre saigesce me soit force, ayde, deffense et appuyal contre si notables et esleuz maistres' (7–8, lines 25–9).

It is in this second dedication that Christine sets the tone of her presentation of the 'querelle': although the debate is 'gracieux et non haineux' (7, lines 9–10), it is nonetheless a 'guerre encomencee' (8, line 33), in which her opponents are 'assaillans', attacking a weaker foe (8, line 41). Clearly this is rhetorical hyperbole, but in the circumstances it is an extremely useful image for Christine as it encourages the reader to see the analogy which she herself draws between her position in the debate and that of women in the *Rose*: both are under siege and in need of defence from misogynist attack. Through careful presentation and wily manipulation of the documents of the 'querelle', Christine thus focuses the reader's attention on to the issue of her own choosing: in this instance, the equation of the sentiments expressed in the *Rose* with those of her adversaries.

Unlike Jean de Montreuil, who refused to reply to Christine directly, or Gontier Col, who was content simply to demand that Christine retract her statements on the *Rose*, it was Pierre Col who engaged most vociferously with Christine in his defence of Jean de Meung, and who continued the imagery of warfare by which to represent their verbal jousting. He belittles his female opponent, claiming that although he himself is not the greatest of Jean's champions, Christine's arguments are so weak as hardly to require refutation by a more worthy defender. The reference to warfare occurs most strikingly in Pierre Col's defence of the *Rose* when he criticises the logic of Christine's condemnation of Raison's proverb "mieulx vaut decevoir que deceuz estre". On the question of correct male behaviour in what he calls 'la guerre amoureuse', Pierre Col develops a hypothetical argument involving himself and Christine:

En oultre je dy qu'il me vaulroit mieux – c'est a dire qu'il me greveroit moins – faire semblant de toy amer pour moy aasier charnelement de ton corps qu'il ne feroit pour celle meisme fin que j'en fuisse fol amoureux, pour quoy j'en perdisse mon estude, 'sans, temps, chastel, corps, ame, los' (come dit est). (99, lines 365–70)

In other words, Pierre here explicitly compares his battle with Christine to that waged by Amant (or 'Fol Amoureux', as he is referred to throughout the 'querelle') on the Rose in Jean's text. Although this manoeuvre is evidently part of the rhetoric of his argument, it nonetheless shows how his view of the sexual politics involved in the debate, in which a weak female defender pits her wits against a powerful male foe, is identical to that of Christine.

Christine exploited this parallel between the debate and the *Rose*, with which Pierre himself would seem to have concurred, in order to denounce her opponent's defence of Jean's view of women and love. In her reply to Pierre's hypothetical argument, she points out that in his fervour to attack her opinions and defend his master's text, he has actually gone one stage further than even the author of the *Rose* in the battle of love, by reducing the lover's choice to that of either deceiving or being a 'fol amoureux': 'Sans faille la faveur que tu y as te fait bien loings aler querre ceste extreme excusacion (et touteffois ne met il point ces .iii. extremités ensemble)' (127, lines 397–9). As we shall see, this is but the first of several instances in which Christine rebukes her opponents, and Pierre especially, for imitating or even seeking to outdo the precepts of Jean de Meung in their behaviour towards both her in particular and womankind in general. She thus blames the disciples' misogynist attitudes on the teachings of the *Rose* and uses this as evidence of its harmful effect on the male reader.

Christine sought to make further capital out of the parallel between herself and the Rose as women under attack, by using it to accuse her opponents of employing the same methods against her as Amant does in Jean's work. She reiterates the image of a battle between her and Pierre when she replies to his assertion that the author of the *Rose* intended to teach women to guard against devious male attackers, rejecting this argument on the grounds that even in the different context of actual warfare, its premises are false: 'se je te conseilloye la maniere de vaincre ton anemy, ce ne seroit mie affin qu'il se gardast de toy' (137, lines 722–3). Moreover, turning to the actual war involved in the debate itself, she asserts that the assaillant

always has the advantage over the defender if he chooses to attack a weaker foe, especially one upon whom he can practise deception. Christine's insistence on depicting herself as the weaker party and the disciples as 'soubtilz maitres/clercs', able to utilise the tricks of sophistry against an unskilled female opponent, allows her directly to equate the methods of deception and assault in the *Rose* with those of her adversaries in the debate (137, lines 706–11). She therefore castigates Pierre for his bad faith in choosing to spend so much effort employing his rhetorical skills against her writings when many other readers, more authoritative and worthy than she, share her opinion of the dangers of Jean's work (145–6, lines 991–3).

Christine's representation of herself, her opponents and the sexual politics involved in the debate is crucial to her critique of her opponents' misogyny. Paradoxically, however, whilst accusing them of verbal sleight-of-hand in their dealings with her, she proves herself to be no mean manipulator of rhetorical arguments in her attempt to turn the debate round to the questions which are of principal importance to her. We need to turn now to the actual substance of their remarks in order to see to what extent she blames their misogynist views on their reading of the *Rose* itself.

At the end of her reply to Jean de Montreuil's treatise, Christine tries to pre-empt a misogynist backlash against her on the part of her opponents: 'Et ne me soit imputé a follie, arrogance ou presompcion d'oser, moy femme, repprendre et redarguer aucteur tant subtil et son euvre admenuisier de louenge, quant lui, seul homme, osa entreprendre a diffamer et blasmer sans excepcion tout un sexe' (22, lines 353–7). She thereby attempts not only to preclude a stream of insults against her speech but also to justify her critical intervention, as a woman, against a male 'aucteur' who had, she believed, calumniated an entire sex. As Christine goes on to imply in her later replies to Gontier and Pierre Col, her opponents' treatment of both her and women in general reproduces much of Jean's own rhetoric of misogyny in their attempts to undermine the legitimacy of her position specifically as female critic.²⁷

Gontier, in his request to Christine for a copy of her reply to Jean de Montreuil, initially uses the term 'femme' in a neutral fashion, addressing her as 'Femme de hault et eslevé entendement' (9, line 2).

²⁷ See Willard, *Life*, 82–4, on the 'patronizing' nature of the Col brothers' remarks to Christine. However, for a different view, see Joseph L. Baird, 'Pierre Col and the *Querelle de la Rose*', *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981), 273–86; and Hicks, 'Situation'.

However, he goes on to contrast her non-authoritative position with the supremely authoritative figure of his 'maistre' Jean de Meung, by describing the latter in hyperbolic terms: 'vray catholique, solempnel maistre et docteur en son temps en saincte theologie, philosophe tres parfont et excellent sachant tout ce qui a entendement humain est scible' (ibid., lines 8–11). On reading the substance of Christine's actual attack on the *Rose*, in his second letter Gontier is more explicitly derogatory towards her, accusing her of being an irrational 'femme passionnee' (23, lines 14–15). He effectively brings against her the charge of 'follie' which she had tried to preclude, a charge which closely resembles the misogynist stereotype of woman's reason being overcome by her emotions found in both the *Rose* and countless other anti-feminist texts.²⁸ Gontier similarly denounces Christine for her 'presompcion' or effrontery, another accusation which she had sought to deflect, in writing not only against such a renowned male author as Jean de Meung but also against his disciples:

te pry . . . que ton dessus dit erreur tu veuilles corrugier, desdire et amender envers le tres excellent et inreprehensible docteur en saincte divine Escripture . . . que si horriblement *oses et presumes* corrugier et repprendre a sa grant charge – et aussi envers ses vrays et loyaux disciples, mon seigneur le prevost de Lisle et moy et autres. (ibid., lines 17–25, emphasis added)

He therefore attempts to question Christine's authority as critic of the *Rose* by branding her an irrational female and by explicitly underscoring the vast difference between her, as woman, and Jean, as *auctor*, together with his fellow male disciples.

Later in the debate, Pierre develops both of these strategies employed by Gontier, similarly using markers of gender to stereotype Christine's words as unthinking and impetuous, and to reinforce the vast divide which should pertain between male and female in terms of learning and authority: 'O parole trop tost yssue et sans avis de bouche de fame, qui condampne home de si hault entendement, de si fervant estude, qui a si grant labour et meure deliberacion a fait si tres noble livre comme celluy de la *Rose*, qui passe aussy tous autres

²⁸ See, for example, Genius' remarks:

Mes, san faille, il est voirs que fame
legierement d'ire s'anflame.
Virgiles meismes tesmoigne,
qui mout connut de leur besoigne,
que ja fame n'iert tant estable
qu'el ne soit diverse et muable.

(*Rose*, lines 16293–8)

qui onques fussent en langage ou il escript son livre' (100, lines 388–93). Pierre too denounces Christine's presumption in speaking against the author of the *Rose*. In a striking backhanded compliment, he appears to praise her verbal dexterity, describing her as a 'femme de grant engin' (109, line 731) who speaks with 'langaige bien ordené' (110, lines 732–3), only to warn her of the dangers of employing these powers against too eminent a target: 's'on t'a loué pour ce que tu as tirey d'un boulet par dessus les tours de Nostre Dame, ne t'essayes pour tant a ferir la lune d'un boujon pesant' (ibid., lines 733–5). However, Pierre goes one better than Gontier and attacks Christine's speech by comparing her to the crow of the fable who sang too loud and lost its supper, an animal image which recalls those frequently employed in misogynist texts to denigrate female speech (ibid., lines 735–8).²⁹ By using such an image, Pierre not only stresses the inappropriateness of Christine's speech but also its non-human qualities, thus reiterating Jean de Meung's representation of women as less than human and a race apart which Christine herself had denounced. In short, both Gontier and Pierre Col reproduce precisely the kind of personal insults which Christine had sought to obviate in the first place. Coupled with the use of misogynist stereotypes, the two brothers' attacks on Christine focus on her gender in order to deny that she can legitimately bridge the gap between female reader and authoritative male writer.

Christine responds with alacrity to the charges laid against her by the Col brothers. To begin with, she is at pains to refute her opponents' use of the term 'femme' as an insult to hurl at her, and thereby demean both her and the sex to which she belongs. She chastises Gontier for stereotyping her as an irrational 'femme passionnee' (23, lines 14–15) which she interprets as a slur on her sex for being 'passionné come par nature' (25, lines 22–3). Instead she re-affirms the desirability of her own standpoint, specifically *as* female: 'saiches de vray que ce ne tiens je a villenie ou aucun repprouche, pour le reconfort de la noble memoire et continuelle experience de tres grant foison vaillans femmes avoir esté et estre tres dignes de louenge et *en toutes vertus aprises*, auxquelles mieulx vouldroye ressembler que estre enrichie de tous les biens de fortune' (ibid., lines 37–43, emphasis added). Central to her valorisation of

²⁹ See, for example, *Le Blasme des Fames*, line 84, in *Three Medieval Views*, where woman's speech is compared to that of the quarrelsome titmouse: 'Femme est mesenge pur tencer.'

women is the assertion that the female sex, far from being doomed to irrationality, shares the common human characteristic of a rational capacity for adopting virtuous forms of behaviour, an assertion which underpins her refutation of misogyny both here and in her later texts in defence of women, most notably the *Cité*. Thus Christine unequivocally identifies her own stance as being motivated by the moral and rational imperative of the pursuit of virtue, describing herself in the letter to her dedicatee Guillaume de Tignonville as 'la mendre des femmes desireuses vie honneste' (7, line 7).

Secondly, in answer to Gontier and Pierre's charge of effrontery in attacking a male *auctor* on the grounds of her lack of learning as an unschooled female, Christine accentuates instead the criterion of her moral virtuousness. When she is armed with the badge of virtue, any such attack on her erudition can easily be deflected and she therefore turns Pierre's taunts to her own advantage. Christine mockingly thanks him for his backhanded compliment that she sings like the over-enthusiastic crow (148), and even replies ironically to his animal image with one of her own which she transforms into a humility topos. Employing this topos to diminish her own accomplishments and to insist that she never laid any claims to clerkly authority (149), Christine describes herself as a mere squeaking grasshopper compared to the more worthy detractors of the *Rose* whom Pierre has chosen not to attack: 'ne suis fors comme la voix d'ung petit grisillon qui toute jour bat ses elettes et fait grant noise, et tout est neant envers le hault chant delitable des gracieux oisiaux' (146, lines 1003–6). In so doing, Christine effectively pre-empts the one charge which her opponents can safely lay against her, lack of a formal schooling, about which she herself complains in a number of her works.

Christine then uses these humility topoi as rhetorical devices by which to legitimate her criticisms of Jean and his disciples on *moral* grounds rather than seeking specifically to establish herself as a female clerkly authority.³⁰ Far from being disqualified from pronouncing truths by her inferior clerkly status, Christine twice attempts to make capital out of it by using the image of a small knife piercing a great, swollen object to underline the veracity of her moral stance in

³⁰ However, see Brownlee, 'Discourses', 216, who places equal emphasis on the moral and clerkly aspects of Christine's bid for authority in the 'querelle'.

the debate. To Gontier she points out that ‘une petite pointe de ganivet ou cotelet puet percier un grant sac plain et enflé de materielles choses’ (25, lines 45–7), and to Pierre she intimates that ‘par une petite pointelette est curey une grant enflure’ (149, lines 1111–12). This latter image of the lancet is extremely apposite, since it represents the culmination of Christine’s attack on the *Rose* as a poisonous and dangerous text which has infected its own disciples with its misogynist doctrine.³¹ She describes its venomous effects on Pierre in particular and hints at the way in which his malady might be cured: ‘O congnoissance pervertie, aveuglee par propre voulanté: qui juges venin angoisseux estre restorement de mort; doctrine perverse estre salvable exemple; fiel amer, miel doulcereux; laidure horrible estre biautey solacieuse; – de qui une simple fammelette, avec la doctrine de sainte Esglise, puet reprendre ton cureur!’ (131–2, lines 535–40). She offers her own views, enlightened by Christian doctrine, as a purgative medicine to Pierre’s moral infection which is all the more dangerous for being an infection of the will. Through apostrophe and parallel invocation of Pierre’s own words to her (‘O parole trop tost yssue et sans avis de bouche de fame. . .’, 100, lines 388–9), Christine specifically employs the same markers of gender in order to point out how Pierre should see himself as a male victim of the deceptions perpetrated by the *Rose* rather than as a willing disciple and ally of Jean de Meung’s in attacking the female sex: ‘O homme, home deceu par oppinion volomptaire!’ (131, lines 531–2).

In the aim of revealing to Pierre the enormity of his error, Christine compares his infection of the will to that of one of the few negative examples of female behaviour which she cites in any of her texts in defence of women: Heloise (146, lines 1015–18).³² By comparing Pierre to Abelard’s famous lover, Christine breaks down the misogynist distinction between virtuous male and vicious female and shows instead how *both* sexes can be susceptible to error.

³¹ See Christine M. Reno, ‘Christine de Pizan: feminism and irony’, in Jonathan Beck and Gianni Mombello, eds., *Seconda miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese* (Chambéry/Turin: Centre d’Etudes Franco-Italien, 1981), 125–33; Joan Ferrante, ‘Public postures and private maneuvers: roles medieval women play’, in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 213–29; and Thelma Fenster, ‘Did Christine have a sense of humor? The evidence of the *Epistre au dieu d’Amours*’, in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 23–36.

³² See Leslie C. Brook, ‘Christine de Pisan, Heloise, and Abelard’s holy women’, *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 109,5/6 (1993), 556–63; and Earl Jeffrey Richards, ‘In search of a feminist pathology: Christine de Pizan and “les glorieux docteurs”’, in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 281–95.

Conversely, by adducing her own good (if immodest!) example, she argues that *both* can be capable of virtue and reason. Christine thus turns round her opponents' criticisms of her presumptuous feminine speech to show how, through her persistent virtuous efforts in attacking the *Rose*, she can help to cure their misogynist infection. She transforms her seemingly unauthoritative position of woman reader, in terms of her lowly intellectual status, into a bastion of female rectitude, in terms of her moral status.

However, the remarks made against Christine by her opponents are matched by those which Pierre Col in particular makes against the whole of womankind. To her mind, he is therefore guilty of adding to the misogynist comments already to be found in Jean's text. Whilst ostensibly refuting the substance of Christine's attack on misogyny in the *Rose*, Pierre actually inserts certain denigratory remarks of his own about the female sex. First, he claims that in the *Rose* Jean in fact condemns men more than women, and cites other *auctores*, whose views are more explicitly negative towards women than Jean's, in order to diminish Christine's attacks on him. For example, he quotes but fails to refute the opinion of one of the Church Fathers: 'saint Ambroise, en ung sien sermon, le blasme plus (le sexe femenin); car il dit que c'est ung sexe usagié a decevoir' (103, lines 500–2).³³ Secondly, Pierre defends Jean's opinion of women not only by quoting further misogynist authorities, but also by claiming that Christine is more of an anti-feminist than the author of the *Rose* himself. He deliberately misinterprets Christine's statement in her reply to Jean de Montreuil that noble women would blush to read the *Rose*,³⁴ and its ending in particular, to mean that she is accusing them of guilt: 'Car pour quoy rougiroient ilz? Il samble qu'ilz se sentiroient coupables des vices que le Jaloux recite de fame' (103, lines 505–7). Thirdly, Pierre answers Christine's charge that a female character like Raison should not refer to male genitals by their proper name. He protests that since it is well known that women speak plainly of their own genitals, they should therefore do

³³ See Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, 'Comment les théologiens et les philosophes voient la femme', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 20 (1977), 105–29; Graham Gould, 'Women in the writings of the Fathers: language, belief and reality', in W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Women in the Church*, Studies in Church History, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1–14; and Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 50–83.

³⁴ 'Et dont que fait a louer lecture qui n'osera estre leue ne parlee en propre forme a la table des roynes, princesses et des vaillans preudefemmes – a qui conviendrait couvrir la face de honte rougie?' (*Débat*, 20, lines 271–4).

likewise when referring to those of men since the latter are no more shameful than the former: 'car fames nomment bien leurs secrés membres par leur propre non' (97, lines 283–4). He thus imputes to female speech in general a frankness and prurience which even the *Rose* does not do. In defending Jean de Meung, Pierre launches his own assault on womankind which, in its zeal, frequently goes beyond even the admonitions of the *Rose* itself.

On the question of women in general, Christine not only refutes Pierre's specific remarks point by point, but once more turns her reply into a positive moral eulogy of certain virtuous and beneficial attributes of the female sex. In reply to Pierre's quotation of Saint Ambrose, Christine strikes at the heart of his misogynist 'citational mode' by accusing her adversary of using quotations out of context.³⁵ She exploits Pierre's invocation of patristic authority as a stick with which to beat both him and the *Rose*, by first elevating Ambrose's allegorical practice above that of Jean de Meung.³⁶ She argues that the saint did not intend his words to be understood literally, but figuratively, in such a way as to blame women not as individual sinners, let alone as representatives of an entire sex, but for their sins: 'si est bon assavoir que saint Ambroise ne le dist oncques pour les personnes des fames: car je croy que le bon sire n'eust riens voulu blasmer fors vices' (135, lines 656–9). Next, Christine points out that misogynists cannot pounce on patristic quotations in order to make generalisations about the sinfulness of the female sex because the Church Fathers themselves cited counter-examples of virtuous women: 'car bien savoit (saint Ambroise) qu'il estoit maintes saintes fames' (ibid., lines 659–60). Lastly, she argues that Ambrose was in fact putting responsibility for the supposed danger which the female represents for the male on to men themselves: 'il vould dire que c'est ung sexe dont home usagieement dessoit son ame' (ibid., lines 660–1), a key argument in her own defence of women, as we have already seen.

Christine goes on to tackle Pierre's second point, upbraiding him for his bad faith in accusing her of attacking women by imputing their blushes on reading the *Rose* to a guilty conscience. She retorts that such a response is due to their virtuous sense of modesty, their 'honte': 'Et de dire que elles en rougiroient, je ne les blasse de riens,

³⁵ See Bloch, 'Medieval misogyny'.

³⁶ On Christine's use of the Church Fathers in this particular context, see Richards, 'In search'.

ains les loe d'avoir la chaste vertu de honte' (136, lines 684–6).³⁷ Indeed, Christine turns this matter of the virtue of modesty in women into one of the major themes of the 'querelle' itself, using it as the touchstone by which to determine the morality of female readers' response to the *Rose*. She even suggests that this response should in fact be shared by all moral-minded individuals, irrespective of their sex: 'Et sans faille plus plaisamment et trop plus doucement et par plus courtois termes s'en feust passé, et qui mieulx plairoient mesmes aux amans jolis et honnestes, et a toute autre vertueuse personne' (20, lines 281–4, emphasis added). In claiming that women's blushes are a refutation of the very criticisms which the text and Pierre, its disciple, are making of the female sex, Christine argues that such blushes are visible proof of women's virtue and therefore constitute a moral reaction to an immoral text.

Christine further exploits this topos of female modesty to answer Pierre's third misogynist assertion that women should talk plainly of the male genitals. She refutes this opinion outright, stating that women's silence on this subject is due, yet again, to 'raisonnable honte qui – Dieux mercis! – n'est mie chasciee de leurs frons' (123, lines 265–6). She then denies that such behaviour is acceptable on the part either of men or of women, taking women's silence as exemplary (*ibid.*). Furthermore, she doubts whether women speak plainly even of their own genitals, as Pierre had claimed, and counters the universal nature of his statement by insisting that 'fames honorables' (*ibid.*, line 275) certainly do not do so, thereby refuting his misogynist generalisation which condemns all women on the basis of the behaviour of a few. In a final rhetorical flourish, she ironically praises Pierre for failing, in practice, to follow his own master's precepts, since throughout his discussion of the question of plain speaking he himself uses the euphemism of 'secrés membres' rather than Raison's explicit 'coilles'. She attributes this laudable failure on Pierre's part to the virtue of modesty, 'Benoitte soit tele honte qui desconfit tele Raison!' (124, lines 292–3). From Pierre's somewhat unwitting good example, Christine extrapolates a moral sentence to show the worthiness of refraining from such speech, on the part of a person of either sex: 'Car parler honneste avec les vertus moult advient en bouche de louable personne' (*ibid.*, 296–8).

³⁷ Although the term 'honte' literally means 'shame' in both Middle and Modern French, it is more appropriate to translate it as 'modesty', since Christine is making the point that such an attribute is a virtue, not a shortcoming.

Christine therefore draws an analogy between her opponents' misogynist attempts to put the virtue of female modesty to rout, especially as regards their advocacy of plain speaking, and Jean de Meung's own attack on the allegorical personification of Honte (Modesty) in the *Rose* itself. In her reply to Jean de Montreuil, Christine castigates the Provost of Lille for exonerating plain speaking in the *Rose*, stating: 'grant tort connectéz contre la noble vertu de honte, qui de sa nature reffraint les goliardises et deshonestetés en dis et fais' (14, lines 83–5). Similarly, in her long letter to Pierre, she defends her position on the moral irresponsibility of mentioning human genitalia in direct terms, stating that this silence is the source of 'honte raisonnable' and should be respected (118, lines 107–9). In her response to the disciples' misogynist attacks on women, and in particular to Pierre's assertion of women's guilt as revealed through their blushes, Christine argues that her opponents' views coincide with those of the author of the *Rose*. Both author and disciples would seem to be united in their immoral attack on the virtue of modesty, a virtue demonstrated by honourable women in their response to the text, thus proving to Christine's mind their, and indeed her own, moral authority.

For Christine, two principal matters are at stake in her critique of misogyny, both here in the 'querelle' and in her other writings in defence of women which address male readers, particularly the *Othéa*. On the one hand, she seeks to 'save' such readers from the harmful moral effects of misogynist teachings, which condemn men to immoral attitudes and behaviour in their amatory relationships with women. On the other hand, she attempts to convince these readers of women's potential and actual status as exemplars of virtues which are applicable to both sexes.

JEAN DE MEUNG'S *ROSE*: A POETICS OF MISOGYNY?

Not content with using moral arguments to denounce what she saw as the misogynist doctrine of the *Rose*, Christine, together with Gerson, also took its author to task for the immorality of his actual literary practice. For some modern scholars, Jean's detractors arrived at this position through their ignorance of the theoretical criteria by which his defenders were seeking to praise his moral authority as writer and to exalt the literary value of his

text.³⁸ However, as the following discussion aims to show, all the protagonists in the debate *were*, in fact, largely agreed on the criteria which determine an author's and a text's worth, and all believed that art and morality were inextricably linked. Where the two sides categorically disagreed is on whether Jean de Meung and the *Rose* actually met such criteria in practice. Indeed, Pierre's defence in particular might have been stronger had he argued, as Jillian Hill has claimed he did, from an 'art for art's sake' position.³⁹ Instead, as we shall see, it is because he too attempts to defend the *Rose* on moral grounds that he finds himself in the awkward position of having to make an ethical case for a text which conveys no clear ethical message.

To illustrate the differences of opinion held by the detractors and defenders of the *Rose*, we need to examine two key issues which are raised in the debate: first, the nature of Jean's authorship and literary authority; and second, the question of readership in the *Rose*.⁴⁰ As Alastair Minnis has shown, such issues formed the mainstay of medieval literary theory and criticism as developed in the tradition of the *accessus ad auctores* prologues of scholastic commentators.⁴¹ From the fourteenth century onwards, this commentary tradition paid increasing attention to 'modern' secular *auctores* such as Dante, who wrote in the vernacular, as opposed to the pagan and scriptural *auctores* writing in Greek and Latin who had been the original focus of such critical inquiry. The discussion of Jean's literary practice in the 'querelle', which should be read as a polemical prologue to a vernacular *auctor*, thus constitutes an important document in the history of this tradition.⁴²

³⁸ See Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*; Fleming, 'The moral reputation'; and Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose*.

³⁹ Hill, *The Medieval Debate*, 241–4. See also Hicks and Ornato, 'Jean de Montreuil', 213.

⁴⁰ See Brownlee, 'Discourses', 216, who observes: 'Christine's overall critical strategy thus involves a systematic insistence on authorial responsibility and on reader response, both in a moral context.'

⁴¹ This discussion draws extensively on Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984; Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988, second edition). For anthologies of scholastic prologues, see O. B. Hardison, Jr., Alex Preminger, Kevin Kerrane and Leon Golden, eds., *Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974); and Alastair J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁴² Minnis's own analysis of the 'querelle', which places it in the context of medieval commentaries on Ovid, reaches similar conclusions to mine on a number of points: see Minnis, 'Theorizing the rose: commentary tradition in the *Querelle de la Rose*', in Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, eds., *Poetics: Theory and Practice in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 13–35.

An 'auctor' assailed: authorship and authority

What were the precise critical criteria established by the prologues of the scholastic tradition and to what extent do they inform the 'querelle'? The type of prologue which was dominant in the twelfth century commented on the book title (*titulus*), the name of the author (*nomen auctoris*), the author's intention (*intentio auctoris*), the subject matter (*materia libri*), the didactic mode of procedure (*modus tractandi*), the arrangement of parts (*ordo libri*), the usefulness of the text (*utilitas*), and the branch of learning to which the work was contributing (*cui parti philosophiae supponitur*).⁴³ After the thirteenth century, the vocabulary used in the scholastic prologue was augmented by and assimilated to a new 'Aristotelian' type which provided a critical model lasting well into the Renaissance.⁴⁴ This second type focused on the author as efficient cause bringing the work into being (*causa efficiens*), with particular attention paid to the life of the author (*vita auctoris*); on the literary subject matter derived from the writer's sources, the material cause (*causa materialis*); on the pattern imposed by the author on the material, the formal cause (*causa formalis*, incorporating both the *forma tractandi* or method of treatment and the *forma tractatus* or organisation of the work); and on the intended overall significance of the work, the final cause (*causa finalis*).

Although the 'querelle' documents themselves lack the explicit analytical rigour of these two types of prologue, the protagonists in the debate examine many of the same issues, at times even employ vernacular equivalents of some of the same vocabulary, and address related matters such as the use made by both scriptural and vernacular writers of rhetoric and imagery, language and authorial roles.

Jean's credentials as an *auctor* were dependent on a variety of factors, the first of which was the supposed usefulness or *utilitas* of the *Rose* as a work of poetry. Both sides in the 'querelle' adhered to the widely held medieval view that the *pars philosophiae* to which poetry properly belongs is ethics, a branch of moral philosophy, because it is concerned with human behaviour.⁴⁵ They were all familiar too with the Horatian commonplace which defined the *utilitas* of poetry ideally in terms of its ability to instruct (*docere*) and not just to please

⁴³ Modern scholars term this kind of prologue the 'type C' paradigm: see Minnis, *Authorship*, 19–25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁵ Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 13.

(*delectare*).⁴⁶ The defenders of the *Rose* are in no doubt that the text *does* fulfil the criterion of instruction as well as that of pleasure, claiming that it provides important moral guidance on how to conduct oneself, which is the very cornerstone of ethics. For Jean de Montreuil, quoted by Christine, the *Rose* is: "'[un]mirouer de bien vivre, exemple de tous estas de soy politiquement gouverner et vivre religieusement et saignement'" (21, lines 320–2). Pierre reinforces his friend's comments, affirming that the ideals adhered to by Jean de Meung are indeed worthy since the *Rose* offers an attack on foolish love and provides the reader with a means of gaining self-knowledge, 'pour ung chascun avoir congnoissance de luy meismes et d'autres' (110, lines 762–3), which is a prerequisite for ethical self-conduct.

Christine, on the other hand, is categorical that the *Rose* fulfils only one of these principles: that of pleasing the reader. Whilst acknowledging the work's obvious poetic worth and beauty, she nonetheless doubts that it provides the reader with adequate moral matter. Although it is written in 'moult beaulx termes et vers gracieux bien leonimes' (13, line 56), she still regards it as worthless: 'toute chose sens preu, non obstant soit traittee, faicte et accomplie a grant labour et paine, puet estre appelee oyseuse ou pis que oyseuse de tant come plus mal en ensuit' (*ibid.*, lines 41–4). She condemns the *Rose* for its 'oysiveté' (12, line 24), a term which echoes the name of a character in the text itself – Oiseuse, who first allowed Amant into the garden, thereby introducing him to a world of pleasure and indolence – and expresses her regret that Jean did not employ his considerable talents on some more worthwhile text (20–1, lines 291–3). Christine then invokes the practice of writers in Antiquity by recalling how the Romans would not honour a work with a laurel crown if it failed to contribute to the common good,⁴⁷ 'se elle n'estoit a l'*utilité* de la chose publique' (21, line 315, emphasis added). By this criterion of *utilitas* to which she explicitly alludes,⁴⁸ she claims that the *Rose* deserves to be destroyed in an 'ensevellissement de feu'

⁴⁶ See Horace, *On the Art of Poetry*, lines 341, and 343–4, in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. and trans. T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 90–1: 'Poets aim at giving either profit or delight, or at combining the giving of pleasure with some useful precepts for life. . . . The man who has managed to blend profit with delight wins everyone's approbation, for he gives his reader pleasure at the same time as he instructs him.'

⁴⁷ See D. A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity*, *Classical Life and Letters* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 86 and *passim*.

⁴⁸ Minnis, 'Theorizing', 23.

(ibid., lines 318–19).⁴⁹ Thus, for Christine, although a text should be pleasing as well as instructive, pleasure alone is not sufficient justification for writing but should be subordinated to the end of edifying the reader. We can see here the state of stalemate which ultimately caused the ‘querelle’ to falter: both sides agree on the principles involved, it is simply that the detractors of the *Rose* refuse to subscribe to the defenders’ opinion that the work is indeed both pleasing and instructive. As Christine herself states: ‘Je ne say a quoy tant nous debatons ces questions, car je croy ne toy ne moy n’avons talent de mouvoir nos oppinions: tu dis qu’il est bon; je dis qu’il est mauvais’ (145, lines 971–3).⁵⁰

Given this deadlock on the issue of the *Rose*’s status as a moral work, an alternative means of determining Jean’s literary authority was to assess his own personal morality and erudition as *causa efficiens* of the text. The question of whether authors’ own moral lapses diminished their learning and authority was hotly debated in academic prologues, particularly after the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when commentators began to focus attention on the author as a fallible human being, rather than just as God’s mouth-piece. In the course of the Middle Ages, this attention to the morals of the author, though initially paid to biblical *auctores* such as Solomon and David, was extended to both pagan and secular authors, culminating in Boccaccio’s treatment of the life of Dante.⁵¹ In the context of the ‘querelle’, both sides cite evidence from Jean’s life, albeit evidence gleaned from his own writings, in order to assess his worth on this moral criterion. Their conclusions, however, are diametrically opposed.

Since Christine holds Jean to be ultimately responsible for all opinions expressed in his work, she presumes that, for instance on the subject of unfaithful women, he arrived at the misogynist views expressed by the Jaloux because he himself, in his own life, failed to seek the company of more virtuous members of the female sex: ‘de croire par ceste raison suis contrainte que onques n’ot accointance ne hantise de femme honnourable ne vertueuse, mais par plusieurs femmes dissolues et de male vie hanter – comme font communement les luxurieux –, cuida ou faingny savoir que toutes telles feussent, car d’autres n’avoit congnoissance’ (18, lines 216–21). Imputing this

⁴⁹ See Solterer, ‘Flaming words’.

⁵⁰ See Hill, *The Medieval Debate*, 71–93.

⁵¹ See Minnis, *Authorship*, 103–12, 214–16; and Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 207–9, 453–8.

lack of moral values in the text directly to the lack of probity in the writer's own life, Christine declares that no amount of authorial erudition on Jean's part can compensate for his personal immorality; hence, for Christine, the *Rose* cannot be regarded as an authoritative text. Moreover, to her mind, Jean would seem to have fallen into the classic misogynist error of blaming lascivious – and by extension all – women for his own lack of chastity.

Gerson emphasises Jean's moral failings by persistently identifying him with the chief protagonist of the *Rose*, whom he refers to as Fol Amoureux. His evidence for making this identification comes from Jean's own confession in his later *Testament* that he had repented of being a foolish lover, a state he then described in the *Rose*: 'des son vivant il s'en repenti: et depuis ditta livres de vraye foy et de sainte doctrine' (66, lines 194–5). Yet, despite this supposed retraction on Jean's part, coupled with his evident erudition, Gerson too concludes that the *Rose* cannot be sanctioned as a useful work to give to readers, especially the young.

On the other side of the debate, neither Jean de Montreuil nor Gontier makes any reference to Jean de Meung's life nor do they attempt to compare his erudition with his morality, claiming that the one naturally presupposes the other. The Provost of Lille affirms the status of the author of the *Rose* as 'disertissimum ac scientificissimum actorem' (28, line 9; most learned and knowledgeable author, *La Querelle*, 43; translation slightly amended), whilst Gontier goes one better in order to stress the authority of his master as both moral and learned, since he is a 'vray catholique' and a 'docteur . . . en sainte theologie' (9, lines 8–9). However, Pierre does tackle the question of Jean's morality directly. For Pierre, Gerson's assertion that the author of the *Rose* had personal knowledge of the state of foolish love should in fact be put to his credit rather than held against him. Indeed, Pierre declares that Jean's experience of foolish love is the very touchstone of his authority since, as a penitent foolish lover, the author, like Solomon and David, is particularly well qualified to condemn such behaviour in his writings: 'Je dy que maistre Jehan de Meung, puis qu'il fut fol amoureux, fu tres fermes en raison: car de tant qu'il congnut mieux la folie qui est en fole amour par experience, de tant la desprisa il plus et loua Raison' (94, lines 191–5). In seeking to make this defence of Jean, Pierre may, as Minnis has argued, have had in mind St Bonaventure's authoritative defence of Solomon as a penitent lover in his commentary on

Ecclesiastes.⁵² Pierre goes on to exalt the primacy of experience when condemning a certain type of behaviour in order to dismiss Gerson's objections to the *Rose*. He states that as a celibate clerk, Gerson can have no experience of amatory matters, 'car trop plus a experience de ne say quelle puissance que n'a meismes l'effait de vive voix' (92, lines 120–2). For this argument, Pierre may have been drawing on another part of St Bonaventure's authoritative defence of Solomon, namely that:

No one who talks about the contempt of such things (as pleasure, wealth, honours, and human preoccupations) has any credibility unless he has actually experienced them himself. . . . The author had to be the sort of person who had experienced all of these things . . . and of an enquiring mind or wise. We have not heard of anyone who had these attributes to such a high degree as Solomon.⁵³

Pierre thus upholds the view that experience, even if it is of a doubtful moral kind, can, provided it is followed by penance, work in conjunction with erudition to consolidate an author's authority. But Christine and Gerson both stoutly reject Pierre's view since, for them, Jean's good intentions, unlike those of Solomon, cannot be confidently assumed.

Indeed, the problem of authorial intention (*intentio auctoris*) is fundamental to both sides of the debate, underpinning all other theoretical questions. It is the key to Christine and Gerson's position on the *Rose* since, given Jean's evident literary status and erudition, their case is based largely on the belief that the author *was* actively seeking to produce a book that would corrupt its readers. Hence the proliferation, in both their writings, of references to the *Rose* as a poison for which Jean must be held responsible. In Gerson's treatise, for example, Eloquence Theologienne berates Jean for having written a work which has never ceased to deprave and destroy since the day it was written: 'tu as par ta folie – quant en toy est – mis a mort et murtri ou empoisonné mil et mil personnes par divers pechiés et encores fais de jour en jour par ton fol livre' (67, lines 221–4). As evidence for believing that this was Jean's actual intention, rather than merely an unforeseen consequence of his

⁵² See Minnis, 'Theorizing', 31–6. For the text of St Bonaventure's commentary, see Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 230–3, 233: 'that book was written by Solomon when doing penance. God does not cast out those who repent, but receives them. In the light of this, Solomon was not in a reprehensible state when he wrote this book.'

⁵³ Minnis, *Theory and Criticism*, 231.

work, the detractors of the *Rose* outline three main areas of contention, all of which were important issues in medieval literary theory: first, the ending of the text; second, its expository indeterminacy due to the lack of a clear authorial voice; and third, its unconventional use of allegorical figures.

Christine and Gerson single out the ending of the *Rose* for particular criticism, since, according to the rules of rhetoric, the ending is paramount in determining the author's intentions, as Christine explains: 'se ung dicteur veult user d'ordre de rethorique, il fait ses premisses de ce que il veult traictier, et puis entre de propos en propos et parle de plusieurs choses s'il luy plaist, puis revient a sa conclusion de ce pour quoy il a faite sa narracion' (135, lines 641–4, emphasis added). Playing on the word 'fin' to link the idea of the ending with that of the intention, since the terms *finis* or *causa finalis* from which 'fin' is derived were used in Aristotelian commentaries to designate authorial intention,⁵⁴ Gerson declares: 'Certes en ce dit livre . . . bien a lieu le proverbe commun 'En la fin gist le venin' (78, lines 480–1). Christine, for her part, states that the ending of a moral text should provide an explicit conclusion in the juridical sense of a summing-up (134–5, lines 636–40).⁵⁵ For both of the detractors, the closing chapter of the *Rose* is therefore particularly pernicious because the allegorical rape which it describes is the final impression that the reader will take away from the text. In view of Christine's later championing of Dante over Jean de Meung in the 'querelle', it is likely that she, if not Gerson, is echoing here the Italian writer's comment in the *Convivio* on the powerful effect of endings on the mind of the reader: 'what a speaker is most intent on conveying must always be reserved for the end, for what is said last makes the most enduring impression on the mind of the listener'.⁵⁶ In their view, though, the danger of the ending of the *Rose* lies principally in the fact that it is left open rather than offering a clear condemnation of the immoral acts which it depicts.

It is Jean's failure to tell his readers clearly what behaviour should be adopted or shunned, not simply at the end of the *Rose* but

⁵⁴ See Minnis and Scott, 'Theorizing', 28; and Minnis, *Authorship*, 29.

⁵⁵ On Christine's familiarity with juridical language, see Maureen Cheney Curnow, "'La pioche d'inquisition': legal-judicial content and style in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*", in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 157–72.

⁵⁶ Dante, *The Banquet*, trans. Christopher Ryan, *Stanford French and Italian Studies*, 61 (Saratoga: ANMA Libri, 1989), 58.

throughout the book, which so perturbs Christine and Gerson. For both of them, simply *showing* a certain type of behaviour tends to recommend it to the reader in the absence of an explicit injunction from the author *telling* the reader otherwise.⁵⁷ Christine cites the example of a description of how to make counterfeit money in order to argue that such a description, even if not *intended* as a recommendation of evil-doing, can still nevertheless have that effect on the reader (137, lines 725–7). By analogy, she asserts that Jean's description of the assault on the castle at the end of the *Rose* illustrates only too well the manner in which such an assault can be undertaken by any would-be assailants (*ibid.*). Both she and Gerson are equally concerned to demonstrate that if showing error, without clearly telling the reader to avoid that error, is not sufficient, neither is the alternative technique of telling the reader to avoid an error whilst showing it to be attractive, as Eloquence Theologienne argues: 'Ung dissolus mauvais fera et dira toute lubricité qui se peust trouver entre home et fame devant une pucelle en disant: "Ne fay pas ainsy come tu nous vois fere, ainsy et ainsy; regarde bien!": sera tel a soustenir?' (73, lines 369–72). On the contrary, both showing and telling need to be unambiguous for the author's intention to become apparent. Gerson thus laments that the *Rose* did not follow the example of the Scriptures: 'c'est assavoir en reprouvant le mal, et tellement que chascun eust apperceu le reproche du mal et l'aprobacion du bien, et – qui est le principal – que tout se fist sans excès de legiereté' (74, lines 381–4). Similarly, Christine finds Jean's text wanting because it fails to adopt the proper form of more explicitly moral works, such as those of the ancient philosophers or the Church Fathers (22, lines 338–9). As a corrective to the dangerous indeterminacy of the *Rose*, Christine recommends that Pierre Col read instead Dante's *Divina Commedia*,⁵⁸ precisely because it is the work of a theologising poet whose intention was to give clear moral instruction to his readership (141–2, lines 868–71).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), second edition, 211–40. See also Minnis, 'Theorizing', 19; and Minnis, *Authorship*, 193–4.

⁵⁸ Christine may well have been familiar with Boccaccio's praise of Dante as '(standing) forth rather as a Catholic and sacred theologian than a mere mythmaker': see Boccaccio on Poetry, 113. See also Robert Hollander, 'Dante *theologus-poeta*', *Dante Studies* 94 (1976), 91–136.

⁵⁹ For a similar view of Dante, see Benvenuto da Imola in his commentary on the *Divina Commedia*, quoted in Hardison, *Medieval Literary Criticism*, 87: 'no other poet ever knew how to praise or blame with more excellence . . . [Dante] honoured virtue with encomia and lacerated vice and vicious men.' On Christine's probable familiarity with Benvenuto's

Christine and Gerson explicitly relate the problem of indeterminacy and the difficulty of pinning down Jean's intentions in the *Rose* to the absence of a guiding authorial voice above that of the character-narrator or the other allegorical protagonists. As Minnis has shown, it is not that Christine or Gerson was unfamiliar with medieval *persona* theory, which distinguished between writers speaking as themselves *in propria persona* and those allowing their characters to speak *in persona aliorum*.⁶⁰ Rather, what they both lament is the fact that nowhere in the *Rose* does Jean appear to speak in his own voice as moral author. Indeed, for Gerson, where the authorial voice can be identified it does not simply fail to correct the morally dubious opinions of characters; even worse, it actually contributes some of the most scabrous points of doctrine in the whole text:

il conseille en sa propre persone et a son exemple essayer de toutes manieres de fames sans difference, et maudit tous ceulx et celles qui ainssy ne le feront . . . Il, en sa persone, nomme les parties deshonestes du corps et les pechiés ors et villains par paroles saintes et sacrees, ainssy comme toute tele euvre fut chose divine et sacree et a adourer. (62, lines 93–101)

Christine and Gerson do not condemn Jean simply for delegating the responsibility for the teachings contained in the text to his allegorical characters. What they chiefly abhor is his flouting of the conventions of allegory as a means of putting across didactic views. In their opinion, Jean fails to observe two key rules of poetic decorum governing allegorical personification, that is, appropriateness of a character's speech and proper attention to the context of that speech.⁶¹ The first of these rules is broken by allegorical figures such as Genius and Nature, who should be made to act in a way consonant with their name and attributes, but who are in fact made to speak out of character. Thus Gerson and Christine express their shock at the inappropriateness of letting Nature, who is meant to symbolise the sublunary force responsible for the perpetuation of species, speak of questions of faith (85, lines 646–7), and Genius, who is presented as Nature's chaplain and confessor, expound on the need for sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage (132, lines 559–65). The worst example of this flagrant breach of convention is Raison, whose speech is, for Gerson, anything but reasonable. He

commentary, which may have served as a model for the layout of her glosses in the earliest manuscript of the *Othéa*, Paris, BN f. fr. 848, see Willard, *Life*, 95.

⁶⁰ Minnis, 'Theorizing', 14–18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14–22.

argues that Jean has reversed the reader's expectation of her character and that of Cupid, since it is the God of Love, in Guillaume's portion of the *Rose*, who counsels discretion in the lover's speech, whereas Raison in Jean's text advocates plain speaking: 'come se Cupido fust plus chaste et raisonnables que dame Raison et Chasteté!' (85, lines 655–6). Gerson also claims that Jean flouts the second rule of poetic decorum, namely the provision of a correct context for a character's speech, which is determined by the person to whom the character speaks, the precise purpose of the speech, etc. Citing once again the example of Raison, Gerson asserts that the context of her speech on how to refer to human genitalia given the fallen nature of language is inappropriate, because the person to whom she speaks, Fol Amoureux, being neither a clerk nor a theologian, is an unsuitable character with whom to discuss such matters (83). As Eloquence Theologienne declares: 'y cy garda mal l'acteur les riegles de mon escolle (les riegles de rethorique), qui sont de regarder cil qui parle et a qui on parle, et pour quel tamps on parle' (85, lines 641–4).

For Christine and Gerson, Jean's failure to observe these two rules of poetic decorum means that generic conventions break down in his text. If an allegorical character can no longer be relied upon to symbolise a personification recognisable from previous literary authorities, it becomes impossible to read that character in any other than a literal fashion. Such is the case of Nature, 'corrumpuement estraitte' (80, line 527), to Gerson's mind, from the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alain de Lille.⁶² As he goes on to argue, once this allegorical contract has been broken, Jean can use the characters of Nature and Genius to put forward his own views and to exhort the kind of behaviour which is the very opposite of what the reader would traditionally expect of such figures (80, lines 518–25). Likewise, once Raison is represented in the *Rose* as acting in a manner unbecoming to her usual attributes of rationality and reasonableness, she can no longer function as an authoritative voice. For Christine and Gerson, she thus becomes a foul-mouthed woman, indoctrinating the foolish lover with Jean's pernicious and irresponsible views.

Paradoxically then, what has ensured the popularity of the *Rose*

⁶² See Economou, 'The character Genius'; and Earl Jeffrey Richards, "'glossa Aurelianus est quae destruit textum': medieval rhetoric, Thomism and humanism in Christine de Pizan's critique of the *Roman de la Rose*", *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales (XIIIe–XVe s.)* 5 (1998), 247–63.

amongst modern post-structuralist critics, namely its indeterminacy and lack of a hierarchy of discourses, was precisely what condemned it in the eyes of at least two of its medieval readers.⁶³ Neither did Christine nor Gerson subscribe to the view, now held by modern patristic critics writing in defence of Jean de Meung, that the inconsistencies in the *Rose* between characters, and even within the speeches of a single character such as Genius, offer cues for an ironic reading of the text which can be seen as a moral condemnation of the lover's pursuit of lustful passion.⁶⁴ The detection of irony necessarily involves the reader's perception of a distance between author and character, or narrator and character, and the ascription of such distance to authorial intention.⁶⁵ For Christine and Gerson, the distance between Jean and his characters is practically non-existent, hence the difficulty of ascribing a moral intention to him.

By contrast, the champions of the *Rose* base their whole defence of the author's intentions on identifying a distance between him and his characters. Whilst Jean de Montreuil anticipates the patristic critics' view that this distance is the clue to its moral lesson about love, Pierre Col strikes an uneasy compromise between this reading and a defence of Jean de Meung's indeterminacy which comes closer to the post-structuralist position. Ignoring Christine and Gerson's point about the importance of the text's ending, the Provost of Lille claims that the *Rose*'s detractors have fundamentally failed to understand the author's intentions as a satirist who has agency over and above that of his characters (42, line 127). Moreover, in classifying the author of the *Rose* as a satirist, Jean de Montreuil is able to defend the openly scurrilous words of Raison and the Jaloux by implicitly drawing on medieval commentators' view of satire as a genre which 'in forthright, unadorned terms censures and corrects vices in

⁶³ See, for example, Michael D. Cherniss, 'Irony and authority: the ending of the *Roman de la Rose*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975), 227–38; Kevin Brownlee, 'The problem of Faux Semblant: language, history, and truth in the *Roman de la Rose*', in Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols, eds., *The New Medievalism* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 253–71; David F. Hult, 'Language and dismemberment: Abelard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*', in Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia J. Huot, eds., *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image and Reception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 101–30; and Sarah Kay, 'Sexual knowledge: the once and future texts of the *Romance of the Rose*', in Judith Still and Michael Worton, eds., *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices* (Manchester University Press, 1993), 69–86.

⁶⁴ Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*; Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose'*. At the same time, however, both critics identify Jean de Meung's authorial voice with that of Reason: see, in particular, John V. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁶⁵ See Peter Haidu, *Aesthetic Distance in Chrétien de Troyes* (Geneva: Droz, 1968).

society and advocates virtues'.⁶⁶ Jean thus asserts that the critics of the *Rose* are wrong to deny its author the poetic licence which permits him to say things for which other non-moralising writers might be condemned, because his characters' words should not be taken at face value but rather as a critique of society and its corrupt mores (*ibid.*).

Pierre similarly argues that the *Rose* is meant to be read ironically, but he replies at greater length than Jean de Montreuil to the detractors' points on indeterminacy and lack of an authorial voice. He justifies the author's intention merely to put forward the opinions of his characters *in persona aliorum* without giving his own views (100, lines 403–6) by relating it to the practice of compilers who, according to St Bonaventure's classification of authorial roles,⁶⁷ report the opinions of other writers without necessarily subscribing to such views themselves, as in the example of Sallust reporting Catiline's denunciation of Rome (101, lines 456–8).⁶⁸ In neither case, Pierre claims, can one ascribe a bad intention to the compiler who simply shows immoral behaviour or reports the immoral opinions of others, on which point he invokes the example of the Bible and its portrayal of Sodom and Gomorrah (102, lines 460–2). For Pierre, Jean expresses his own intention solely in his authorial apology, where he affirms *in propria persona* that his role is merely to allow others to speak and that his aim here is to pre-empt any charges that he is seeking to condone the misogyny, anti-clericalism and bawdy language uttered by his *personae*: 'Car la seulement parle il come aucteur et la come aucteur il dit . . . qu'il n'y fait "riens fors reciter"' (110, lines 747–60).

However, in seeking to make a virtue of the indeterminacy and limited authorial interventions in the *Rose*, Pierre is then left with few convincing arguments with which to claim that Jean's intentions *are* moral. For instance, Pierre attempts to assert that there is no doubt that the author's aim *was* to follow Guillaume who, in the first part

⁶⁶ Paul Miller, 'John Gower, satiric poet', in Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 79–105, 82. See also Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 116–19, 136–7, 474–5.

⁶⁷ The four roles which St Bonaventure outlines – scribe, compiler, commentator and author – are differentiated according to the extent to which the writer is responsible for all the views expressed in the work, the scribe being the least and the author the most responsible: see Minnis, *Authorship*, 94.

⁶⁸ Minnis, 'Theorizing', 19, cites the example of Abelard's Prologue to the *Sic et non* as an instance of an author's defence of 'reporting' another's views: see Minnis, *Theory and Criticism*, 90–2. See also Minnis, *Authorship*, 193–210.

of the *Rose*, had exhorted his readers to pursue virtue and flee vice: 'Pour ce parle il de paradis et de vertus: pour les suir' (106–7, lines 628–9), a view commonly held by patristic critics. Yet, in arguing that Jean speaks *in propria persona* only in his apology, Pierre has no clear authorial declaration with which to back up this assertion of moral intentions. In practice he is forced to contradict his own logic and to pass off moral sentences by Jean's characters as those of the author himself. For example, although Pierre is careful to preface his citations with caveats such as 'ne dit il pas en chapistre du Jaloux' (102, line 474), he is nonetheless confident in claiming such views to be Jean's even if there is no justification for it in terms of his own insistence on the clear separation between author and characters. Thus he regards Jean as being responsible for the defence of chastity from the episode of the Jaloux, the castigation of male sins as opposed to those of females from the speeches of Nature, and the warning against youthful folly from the mouth of Raison (102–3). Moreover, in defending the *Rose* against Christine and Gerson's specific charge of the inappropriateness of characters' speech, Pierre has to resort to a distinctly circular argument which only serves to undermine his case still further. In his view, Raison's use of bawdy language when talking to the underclerk Fol Amoureux is both appropriate and moral because, he claims, Jean's precise didactic intention here is to show how she tries to lead the lover away from foolish passion: 'Quant Raison les nonme elle presche au Fol Amoureux qu'il s'ostast de la Fole amour' (97, lines 310–1). Yet, in order to prove this point, Pierre has no explicitly moral sentences that he could quote Raison as saying with which to back up this attribution of moral intention to the author.

Neither Christine nor Gerson was slow to pick up on the inconsistencies in Pierre's defence of Jean's intentions. On the one hand, Christine rebukes him for what she perceives to be his faulty logic and duplicity in collapsing or maintaining the distinction between author and character purely for the convenience of his own argument. To her mind, Pierre invokes the author behind his characters in order to prove his moral intentions whilst, conversely, insisting on the independence of the characters when a less savoury sentence is enounced. On the subject of marriage for instance, Christine criticises Pierre for suggesting that it is Jean who praises wedlock in the chapter of La Vieille, whilst, in fact, the character herself states plainly, "toutes pour tous et tous pour toutes" (143,

lines 911–12). As Christine observes, Pierre cannot have it both ways: ‘Et si croy que maistre Jehan de Meung ne fist point dire a elle ce mot pour louer mariaige, car ce n’estoit mie son office; et te souviengne que tu as dit autre part que ce n’estoit pas Meung qui parloit’ (ibid., lines 920–4). Gerson, on the other hand, argues that, in taking Jean’s apology at face value, Pierre must accept the logical implications of the author’s desire to present himself as a mere compiler. In his reply to a letter from Pierre which had attacked his dream-vision, Gerson declares that by claiming merely to have collated the work of others and added nothing of his own, Jean relinquishes all responsibility for his own text. As Minnis has stated: ‘In Jean’s *apologia*, the traditional protestation of the compiler is well on its way to becoming a “disavowal of responsibility” trope.’⁶⁹ Following this line of logic, Gerson goes on to assert that Pierre cannot praise Jean as author of the moral parts of the *Rose* if he refuses to blame Jean as compiler of the immoral parts:

Quamobrem nolite vos, admiratores sui, laudem ei tribuere si bene dixit, sicut non vult maledicta sua in probrium eius versa iri si quedam arguenda transtulerit. (170, lines 165–7)

(Wherefore you, his admirers, do not seek to praise him if he spoke well, since he himself, in bringing controversial matters into the book, denies responsibility for wicked words which might bring shame upon it.) (*La Querelle*, 150)

As Christine and Gerson see it, the convoluted and contradictory arguments which Pierre is forced to adopt to defend his master are evidence that there can be no positive interpretation of Jean’s intentions in the *Rose*. Pierre’s desperate glossing of the awkward passages of the *Rose* points this up only too visibly, as Christine exclaims: ‘Voire, come dist le proverbe commun des gloses d’Orliens, qui destruisent le texte’ (144, lines 953–4). For the two detractors of the *Rose*, Jean’s authority is called into question on all counts: they deem him to have failed to match the pleasure provided by the text with a didactic message, to find a balance between his own erudition and morality, or to guide his readers by means of unambiguous exposition and conventional use of allegory. As we shall see in the following chapters, the criteria by which Christine faults the *Rose* are

⁶⁹ Minnis, *Authorship*, 198. See also Jill Mann, *Apologies to Women: Inaugural Lecture delivered 20th November 1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

precisely those which underpin her own literary practice as moral author writing in the service of a defence of women.

Readership and the 'Rose': response and responsibility

The detractors of the *Rose* base their negative opinion of its moral teachings not simply on their views of authorship but also on their conception of readership. First, both Christine and Gerson express their general nervousness about the reader's moral vulnerability when faced with inflammatory literary material, such as that contained in the *Rose*. Secondly, they voice their specific concerns about the potential harmful effects produced on the reader of the *Rose* by its volatile literal and figurative language, and inclusion of material from other texts of doubtful moral authority. Thirdly, Christine in particular takes issue with Pierre's defence of the *Rose* as a text which delegates responsibility for moral edification from the author to the reader. Although modern critics such as both Robertson and Delany have accused the detractors of an untimely prudishness in raising these issues,⁷⁰ it is important to note that Christine and Gerson were by no means alone in their preoccupation with the reader's well-being. As reference to the academic prologue tradition will reveal, many of these issues were also the subject of intense debate amongst medieval literary commentators.

Christine's and Gerson's belief in the moral vulnerability of readers of texts such as the *Rose* is grounded in the Church's teaching on Original Sin. Using an image which suggests the weak state of the reader, Christine declares that it is pointless to stress to a sick person that they must not eat the kind of unripe fruit which will harm them if in so doing one makes the fruit seem all the more appetising and delicious. The fevered mind of the reader/sick person will only remember the pleasing description of the fruit and will forget the advice not to touch it: 'Vraiment je tiens que mieulx li souvendroit et plus luy aroit penetré en son appetit les choses nommees que la deffence faicte de non en mengier' (125, lines 328–31). She sums up her view of the reader's moral vulnerability, and thus the inadvisability of including anything in a didactic text which can be misinterpreted, with the help of the image of a limping foot to express the idea of human predisposition towards evil: 'nature humaine, qui de

⁷⁰ Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, 361; and Delany, '“Mothers”', 98–9.

soy est encline a mal, n'a nul besoing que on lui ramentoive le pié dont elle cloche pour plus droit aler' (22, lines 329–31).

Gerson develops and amplifies Christine's concerns, similarly employing the idea of a foot which could stumble and fall at any moment, although he stresses that it is the young who are most likely to fall victim to the blandishments of the *Rose*: 'Vices et pechiés, croy moy, s'apranent trop de legier: n'y fault maistre quelconque; nature humaine, par especial en jeunesse, est trop encline a trebuchier et a glassier et cheoir en l'ordure de toute charnalité: n'estoit besoing que tu les y tirasses ou a force boutasses' (67, lines 207–12). The Chancellor of Paris outlines the specific perils of literary texts for an untrained, youthful readership by comparing the *Rose* with the Song of Songs. The latter, despite being of an undeniably religious nature, is nevertheless written in such a way that it should only be given to readers over thirty (!) in order to avoid any wilful misinterpretation: 'affin qu'ilz n'y entendissent quelconque malvaïse charnalitée' (74, lines 393–4). Gerson's concern with careful reading of the Song of Songs was by no means atypical, as Minnis points out: 'On the literal level, Solomon's song seemed to resemble the lascivious fables (particularly those by Ovid) studied in courses on grammar. Because they comprised the subject of a Scriptural text, the apparently erotic encounters recorded by Solomon demanded "reverent interpretation" – and got it in abundance.'⁷¹ However, for Gerson, the *Rose* is all the more to be avoided as there is no discernible religious inspiration behind it. Indeed, he maintains that, through the person of the foolish lover, the text enacts its own effect on the young reader, for its aim is to attack the virtues, above all that of modesty: 'mauvaises paroles et escriptures courrumpent bonnes meurs et font devenir les pechiés sans honte et ostent toute bone vergoingne, qui est en jeunes gens la principal garde de toutes bones condicions contre tous maulx' (75–6, lines 422–6).⁷²

As evidence for their criticism that the *Rose* corrupts the unwary reader, Gerson and Christine raise a second set of issues concerning readership. On the one hand, they condemn its use of sexual

⁷¹ See Minnis, *Authorship*, 43. On the status of this work in the medieval period, see Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 25–41. For an example of a medieval commentary on the Song of Songs, see that of Giles of Rome in Minnis, *Theory and Criticism*, 243–7.

⁷² The classic example of the misuse of the written word for erotic purposes is, of course, that of Paolo and Francesca in the *Divina Commedia*, *Inferno* 5: see Susan Noakes, 'The double misreading of Paolo and Francesca', *Philological Quarterly* 6 (1983), 221–39.

language in both a literal and a figurative context, and on the other, they castigate the *Rose* for including morally dubious material from other literary sources. First, then, the actual language used by many of the characters in the text gives them both cause for concern in terms of its potentially inflammatory effect on the reader. Whilst Gerson expresses his revulsion at the ‘feu de paroles luxurieuses a merveille, ordes et deffendues’ (61–2, lines 73–4) from the mouths of Venus, Cupid, Genius and even the author himself, Christine develops a more far-reaching critique of the language employed in the *Rose*, arguing that Jean showed no respect for the need to speak and write with extreme caution if he was to benefit the reader. In order to counter Jean de Montreuil’s view that plain speaking is permissible about all things created by God, Christine points out that since the Fall, many things which were once innocent, such as the human genitals, have since become corrupt to the extent that the words used to designate them have become tainted and should now be avoided.⁷³ She states that since the thing determines the word and not vice versa, the possibility of speaking plainly of a corrupt thing is precluded: ‘le nom ne fait la deshonesteté de la chose, mais la chose fait le nom deshonneste’ (14, lines 89–90). For Christine, a necessary concomitant of the author’s responsibility to praise or blame in a moral work is that of their responsibility towards the reader in the use of language. As Hicks has pointed out: ‘Autant Gerson que Christine . . . sont persuadés de l’efficacité morale de la parole, qui sous-tend la mission du prédicateur ou de l’écrivain engagé.’⁷⁴ To persist in letting a character speak plainly, despite the dangers of doing so, necessarily raises doubts about the morality of the author’s intention towards the reader. Moreover, Christine rules out the admissibility of euphemism to designate things of dubious virtue, for she argues that this too raises the problem of intention, so that it only becomes permissible to use a euphemism to speak of the human genitals if the intention is good:

se pour certain cas de maladie ou aultre neccessité il convenoit declairier ou les membres ou quoy que ce fust, et j’en parloie en maniere que on m’entendist et non nommer par propre non, je ne parleroye point deshonestement: la cause si est pour ce que la fin pour quoy j’en parleroye ne seroit pas deshonneste. (117, lines 71–6)

⁷³ See Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1968).

⁷⁴ Hicks, ‘Situation’, 60.

For Jean's detractors, the problem of the effects produced on the reader by the language used in the *Rose* is further exacerbated by the fact that it mixes different registers of figurative expression. It employs terms of a sacred register to express the profane, such as the earthly paradise for a garden of love, but in such a way as to undermine the sanctity of the sacred term.⁷⁵ As Gerson states: 'Quant il parle des choses saintes et divines et espirituellenes, il mesle tantost paroles tres dissolues et esmovans a toute ordure' (62, lines 87–9). Christine takes particular exception to Jean's habit of using religious terms as a figurative euphemism for human genitalia and so she rejects Pierre Col's assertion that in the *Rose*, the use of the term 'sainctuaires' (93, lines 164–5) to refer to women's genitals was motivated by a similarity between the holiness of the portals of a city and a woman's chastity (93–4, lines 171–7). To her mind, Jean was not searching for metaphorical appropriateness but rather employing the image to excite readers and to lead them into error: 'onques ne le dist en entencion de la chose qu'elle puist estre appelee sainte, mais le dist par une maniere d'une desrision plus aluchaint, ou pour plus grant atisement aux luxurieux' (121, lines 186–8). In other words, for Christine, the author of the *Rose* misuses euphemism as a veil or integument which, according to scholastic allegoresis, should clothe a higher truth in literal language.⁷⁶ Rather than leading the reader towards such a truth, Jean's allegory actually *descends* from the spiritual to the literal. As Maureen Quilligan has put it: 'Lifting the veil of such metaphorical language is simply to lift up skirts, to discover physical objects only.'⁷⁷ For the detractors of the *Rose*, the danger of its use of language lies in its tendency to lead the reader's mind back towards earthly matters, by advocating explicit literal terms for tainted objects and by its profanation of the sacred through inappropriate figurative euphemisms. In Christine and Gerson's view, these problems are symptomatic of the general effect produced by the *Rose* on its readers in encouraging them to seek vice and to flee from virtue.

⁷⁵ See Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan, the conventions of courtly diction and Italian humanism', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 250–71.

⁷⁶ See Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 120–2.

⁷⁷ Maureen Quilligan, 'Words and sex: the language of allegory in the *De Planctu Naturae*, the *Roman de la Rose* and Book III of *The Faerie Queene*', *Allegorica* 2 (1977), 195–216, 199. See also Alastair J. Minnis, *Lifting the Veil: Sexual/Textual Nakedness in the 'Roman de la Rose'* (King's College London: Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1995); and Richards, "'glossa Aurelianusensis'".

Gerson voices the second of his and Christine's concerns when he goes on to attack Jean for including within his own perilous work dangerous texts from previous authors, thus turning the *Rose* into a veritable compendium of salacious literary matter. Most notably, Gerson castigates Jean for his injudicious inclusion of mythological fables, such as that of Venus and Mars from Ovid, as well as of characters and teachings from the satirical works of Juvenal, both of whom were the subject of debate in the Middle Ages as to their usefulness for a Christian audience (76–7).⁷⁸ Although by the thirteenth century Ovid had become a standard author on the university grammatical curriculum, scholastic commentators had to justify his status by claiming to find philosophical truths veiled under his poetic 'lies' and frequently base subject matter.⁷⁹ This search for an allegorical integument in Ovid's works culminated in the numerous fourteenth-century moralisations of his works by mythographers such as the anonymous author of the *Ovide moralisé*, Pierre Bersuire, and Christine herself in the *Othéa*.⁸⁰ Similarly, as we saw when discussing Jean de Montreuil's defence of the *Rose* as a satire, medieval commentators were also at pains to justify the 'naked' truths and the often obscene and riotous behaviour depicted by Juvenal and other satirists by imputing a didactic purpose to works in this genre.⁸¹ Gerson would seem to disapprove of the fact that Jean both incorporates Ovid into the *Rose* without an accompanying mythographical apparatus and cites Juvenal without a clear indication as to the butt of his satire. In other words, for Gerson, the *Rose* fails to include the critical framework needed in order to neutralise the potentially dangerous impact of such texts which he declares to have been 'translatés, assemblés et tirés come a violence et sans propos' (76, lines 443–4).⁸²

⁷⁸ Gerson's caution on this matter, which also extended to the type of acceptable story material which could be included in sermons, is typical of preachers of his time: see D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20–2.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Boccaccio's defence of pagan poets in *Boccaccio on Poetry*, 104–5: 'Some men have thought that the learned poet merely invents shallow tales, and is therefore not only useless, but a positive harm. This is because they read discursively and, of course, derive no profit from the story. Now this work of mine removes the veil from these inventions, shows that poets were really men of wisdom, and renders their compositions full of profit and pleasure to the reader' (emphasis added). See also Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 113–64.

⁸⁰ See Jane Chance, ed., *The Mythographic Art* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1990).

⁸¹ Minnis and Scott, *Theory and Criticism*, 116–18, 134–50.

⁸² As Minnis observes ('Theorizing', 35–6, n. 97), in his reply to Pierre Col Gerson makes a

As the final element in the detractors' critique of readership in the *Rose*, Christine attacks Pierre Col's view of the reader, which, because he does not reply to all of her and Gerson's objections, has to be deduced from his general remarks. Pierre readily agrees with his antagonists on the need for texts to inculcate moral views and so he persistently claims that the *Rose* is concerned not to condone the behaviour of its chief protagonist but to condemn it: 'ne fault ja qu'on s'efforce de plus blasmer Fol Amoureux que fait le livre de la *Rose*' (92, lines 141–2). Yet whilst Christine and Gerson insist on the need for moral texts to be unequivocal, since the vulnerable reader is likely otherwise to be tempted into an erroneous reading, Pierre ignores this problem and instead assumes that the reader *will* be able to arrive at the moral meaning of the *Rose*. Despite the text's mixture of good and evil, Pierre declares that the reader will not be led astray or tempted into reading wrongly, provided they read the text enough times (102, lines 471–4). He reinforces this argument that texts can legitimately mix both good and evil without corrupting their audience by citing the example of sermons: 'Quant tu vas au sermon, n'ois tu pas aux prescheurs respondre les vices que tous les jours font homes et fames, affin qu'ilz aillent le droit chemin? . . . on doit ramentevoir le pié de quoy on cloche pour plus droit aler!' (ibid., lines 462–6). Pierre's confidence in the reader of the *Rose* parallels that expressed by Chaucer in the implied readers of the *Canterbury Tales* who are invited to take what they want out of the text and leave those parts which fail to please them.⁸³ In the case of both Jean and Chaucer, it is their assumption of the role of the compiler which allows them to afford the reader freedom of choice (*lectoris arbitrium*),⁸⁴ a notion with which Pierre would seem to concur. It is thus the reader who becomes responsible for reading the text morally rather than the author for ensuring that nothing immoral is included in the text.

For Christine, this delegation of responsibility from author to reader is unacceptable, given the moral vulnerability of the latter. She refutes Pierre's claim that sermons function like literary texts in

point of stating that he has actually read all of Jean's sources, including both Ovid and Juvenal, to show that he was speaking not out of ignorance but *en connaissance de cause* (*Débat*, 172).

⁸³ See Minnis, *Authorship*, 201–2: "'Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys'", warns Chaucer; "Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame" (I, lines 3181, 3185).'

⁸⁴ Ibid., 201.

mixing good and evil by pointing out that preachers do not allow their listeners complete freedom of interpretation. Unlike the author of the *Rose*, they unequivocally condone good and condemn evil: 'Ainns [le preescheur] ramentoit ce pié de telle maniere que il fait grant orreur aux oyans' (134, lines 613–15). Moreover, she dismisses as a wilful deformation of the text Pierre's own method of selective reading, and in particular his attempt to exonerate Genius, whose speech is probably the most controversial of all the characters' except Raison's: 'Si en recites voirement plusieurs de ceulz propos que il dist, mais tu en trespases assés, et vas queillant sa et la ceulx qui mieux te plaisent; et n'as talent de mettre arriere le bien que il dist permy le mal' (145, lines 962–5). Christine accuses Pierre of manipulating the *Rose* to make it fit his view of it, finally dismissing his attempts as those of an alchemist, who seeks to make gold out of filth (126, lines 365–6). Paradoxically, then, Pierre manages to do what Christine claims is impossible, that is to read the *Rose* as a moral text. She is therefore obliged to accuse Pierre of *misreading* Jean's work, since, to her mind, there is no chance of turning his text into a *Roman de la Rose moralisé*.⁸⁵

The fundamental difference between the two sides' views of readership in the *Rose* concerns their notion of the reader's competence. For Pierre, competent readers are assumed to be already moral and can read the *Rose* only to confirm what they previously know, arriving at its moral lessons in spite of its mixed registers and expository ambiguities. For Christine, readers are assumed to be in need of further moral instruction which cannot be provided by a text which affords its readers the kind of interpretive latitude which can lead to sinfulness. Unlike Pierre, she believes that the reader's freedom of choice should be curtailed by a authoritative text in which the author acts as a moral guide. As we shall see, this belief informs her own literary practice, particularly in the *Othéa*, where she provides not only a safe mythographical framework for the stories she borrows from Ovid, but also a set of instructions for her reader in the art of moral and allegorical interpretation.

⁸⁵ One late-fifteenth-century reader of Jean de Meung's text, Jean Molinet, did in fact see fit to 'moralise' it: his *Romant de la Rose moralisie cler et net*, composed around 1482, was printed three times in the following century. See Huot, *The Romance of the Rose*, 315, n. 14.

CONCLUSION

In contrast with those studies which have dismissed Christine's moralistic attack on the *Rose* as being motivated merely by prudishness or political conservatism, this discussion has aimed to show that morality not only provides the foundation for her critique of Jean de Meung's misogynist doctrine and his literary practice, it is also the key to understanding how, for Christine, the two issues are intimately related. To her mind, Jean's immoral view of women as non-human and irrational, corporeal and corrupting, is conveyed through a mode of allegorising which fails to raise its readers to the higher realm of the spiritual and instead confines them to the material realm of the literal, with all its perilous associations with the bodily side of human experience. Christine condemns the slander of women in the *Rose* as doubly immoral, since Jean does not simply attack the female sex but attempts to do so with impunity by delegating all ethical and didactic responsibility for his own views to his characters. Moreover, Christine takes what she perceives to be the misogynist attitudes of the author's own disciples as evidence for her view that the *Rose* is dangerous in that it seduces even those readers who strive to find a moral message within it and infects them with its 'poisonous' doctrine.

Previous positive assessments of Christine's contribution to the 'querelle' have shown how it outlines the principal arguments of her defence of women, arguments which were to receive their fullest expression and development in the *Cité*. However, as the following chapters will contend, in addition to setting out her substantive points of disagreement with misogyny, it is important to emphasise that Christine's literary criticism in the 'querelle' forms the basis of her own choice of rhetorical strategies throughout her anti-misogynist writings. In other words, Christine conceives of her defence of women as an ethical doctrine *and* as a moralising literary practice. As a doctrine, it involves a two-fold valorisation of the female sex in terms of both the shared humanity of women and men and what Christine deems to be women's specific contribution to humanity. First, she stresses that, in their common essence as human beings, male and female are not fundamentally distinguished but are both sentient creatures, capable of rational thought and of virtuous behaviour. This perspective, which challenges the misogynist tendency to define the female sex primarily in terms of the body rather

than of the mind, pervades all of Christine's texts in defence of women, particularly the *Cité*. Secondly, she rejects any presentation of the differences between men and women as a moral hierarchy in which males are elevated over females. Rather, she underlines the complementarity of the two sexes as mutual helpmeets and companions, an approach which she was to pursue in greatest detail in the *Trois Vertus*. Thus Christine locates her refutation of Jean's view of love within an ethical framework which stipulates that virtuous conduct in the personal realm is the key to laudable conduct in the political sphere, a lesson which is addressed to the male reader in the *Othéa* and to the female reader in the *Trois Vertus*.

Since her defence of women is motivated explicitly by her broader ethical assumptions, it follows that, in her own literary practice, Christine as author does not absent herself from the text nor does she speak through abstract personifications of dubious authority. Instead, she adopts in turn one of two possible strategies. On the one hand, in texts such as the *Avision* and the *Cité*, she teaches by example, depicting herself as a protagonist in her own works who must undergo the processes of ethical instruction which she, as author, expects her reader to follow. On the other hand, in those texts where Christine does not appear as a character after an initial preface or prologue, she provides in her place a female figure of unimpeachable moral authority, such as the allegorical figure of Prudence Mondaine in the *Trois Vertus*. As part of her moralising literary practice, Christine's use of multiple allegorical levels in the *Othéa* and the *Avision* contrasts sharply with the mode of allegorising found in the *Rose*. Unlike Jean, Christine explicitly persuades her reader to search beyond the allegorical veil to find the higher, spiritual truths which it conceals. Finally, since she sees misogyny as a doctrine which is deleterious to the well-being of both sexes, her anti-misogynist programme is aimed at edifying two different sets of readers. When speaking to the female reader, in the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus*, Christine strives to rouse her from the despondency that misogyny induces when it claims that women cannot aspire to virtue, and to encourage her, as a moral being, to take responsibility for her own actions and reputation. When speaking to the male reader, particularly in the *Othéa*, Christine seeks to prevent him from accepting misogynist slanders of women which, by leading him to commit immoral acts, ultimately harm the slanderer more than the female object of his calumnies. It is to this text that we must now turn.

*The ‘Epistre Othéa’: an ethical and allegorical
alternative to the ‘Roman de la Rose’?*

The ‘querelle de la *Rose*’ provides a useful starting point for our understanding of Christine de Pizan’s defence of women since, in her contribution to the debate, she offers an explicit and comprehensive critique of what she perceived to be Jean de Meung’s misogynist doctrine and immoral poetics. It is in the context of this critique that we can make sense of Christine’s *Othéa*,¹ for in this work she supplies the male reader with an implicit attack on, and a positive alternative to, both Jean’s doctrine of love and his literary practice which she was to condemn more fully in the ‘querelle’. In this way, the *Othéa* can be seen as an ethical and literary anti-*Rose*.

Written between 1399 and 1400 as a book of moral instruction for the young knight or prince, the *Othéa* takes the form of a fictional letter by the eponymous pagan goddess, who symbolises prudence, addressed to the Trojan hero Hector.² The letter comprises one hundred chapters, each consisting of a miniature illustrating a verse ‘texte’,³ usually of four lines, in which Othéa recounts the story of

¹ All page references in this chapter will be to the *Othéa*, unless otherwise stated. To avoid ambiguity, some modifications have been made to the text: accents have been added to feminine nouns where appropriate and to masculine past participles.

² See Gianni Mombello, ‘Recherches sur l’origine du nom de la Déesse Othéa’, *Atti dell’Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 2, *Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* 103,2 (1969), 343–75. For a succinct synopsis of Mombello’s argument, see Kennedy, *Guide*, 86, item 35: ‘In the Liturgy of Good Friday the words “Agios o Theos” may have been taken by a listening audience to mean “sanctus deus”. Hence Othéa = Goddess.’

³ See Lucie Schaefer, ‘Die Illustrationen zu den Handschriften der Christine de Pizan’, *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 10 (1938), 119–209; Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Late XIVth Century and the Patronage of the Duke*, 2 vols. (London: Phaidon, 1967); Meiss, ‘Atropos-mors: observations on a rare early humanist image’, in J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale, eds., *Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson* (University of Toronto Press, 1971), 151–9; Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbours and their Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); Sandra L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan’s ‘Epistre Othéa’: Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986); and Charles Sterling, *La Peinture médiévale à Paris* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1987).

a character from classical mythology or from the history of Troy. The 'texte' is followed by a 'glose' in which Christine, as authorial voice, explains the moral significance of the 'texte' to the knight, with frequent recourse also to euhemeristic interpretation.⁴ Each chapter then ends with an 'allegorie', also provided by Christine, which expounds the spiritual significance of the story for the benefit of the knight's soul. Each 'glose' and 'allegorie' finishes with a quotation, the former with an 'autorité' from pagan philosophy, the latter with a citation from one of the Church Fathers or the Scriptures.⁵ The work has been termed a 'double courtesy book', as it offers advice both on the earthly and the spiritual dimensions of the knight's role.⁶ In terms of its ethical content, if not its highly elaborate allegorical form, the *Othéa* also resembles three of Christine's later texts which belong to the 'mirror for princes' genre: the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (1404), the *Livre du corps de Policie* (1407) and the *Livre de la paix* (1413–14).

As the large number of extant manuscripts and printed editions attests, the *Othéa* was undoubtedly the most popular of Christine's works in the medieval period.⁷ It catered for its contemporaries' taste for encyclopaedic digests of knowledge in the form of *summae* or *specula*, as well as for stories from classical mythology accompanied by a didactic framework and extensive illustrations.⁸ It was enjoyed up to 150 years after it was first written and was translated three

⁴ Euhemerism is an interpretive practice according to which classical gods and goddesses should be seen merely as famous men and women rather than as divine or supernatural beings. See Raymond de Block, *Euhémère et sa doctrine* (Brussels: Librairie Manceaux, 1876); John Daniel Cooke, 'Euhemerism: a medieval interpretation of classical paganism', *Speculum* 2 (1927), 396–410.

⁵ For a discussion of the manuscript layout of the three different parts of the text, see Mary Ann Ignatius, 'Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othéa*: an experiment in literary form', *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns 9 (1979), 127–42.

⁶ See Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton University Press, 1966), 33–45, 44.

⁷ See Gianni Mombello, 'Per un'edizione critica dell'*Epistre Othéa* di Christine de Pizan', *Studi Francesi* 24 (1964), 401–17 (parts I & II); 'Per un'edizione critica dell'*Epistre Othéa* di Christine de Pizan', *Studi Francesi* 25 (1965), 1–12 (parts III & IV); *La Tradizione manoscritta dell'Epistre Othéa di Christine de Pizan: prolegomeni all'edizione del testo* (Turin: Accademia delle Scienze, 1967); and 'Notizia su due manoscritti contenenti l'*Epistre Othéa* di Christine de Pizan ed altre opere non identificate', *Studi Francesi* 31 (1967), 1–23.

⁸ See Jacqueline Cerquiglini, 'Histoire, image: accord et discord des sens à la fin du Moyen Age', *Littérature* 74 (1989), 110–26.

times into Middle English.⁹ The *Othéa* has, however, posed difficulties for modern readers. Indeed, some early twentieth-century critics even dismissed the book as unreadable, due to its cumbersome allegorical apparatus and lack of narrative coherence.¹⁰ In more recent years, the *Othéa* has been re-examined by feminist scholars, but has remained problematical since opinion is divided as to whether it celebrates or castigates the female sex. On the one hand, critics such as Christine Reno have lauded Christine's 'feminising intention' as a woman author to valorise the achievements of her female characters in the *Othéa*.¹¹ For Reno, Christine, by re-working the literal or narrative level of her source material taken principally from the *Ovide moralisé*, casts a favourable light on female figures whom earlier male mythographers had vilified. When discussing Medea, for example, the author downplays her faults and instead concentrates on lauding Medea's worthy attributes, such as her great learning. On the other hand, critics like Susan Schibanoff have reached the opposite conclusion, claiming that in fact Christine's glosses in the *Othéa* indicate that she 'was perfecting the art of patriarchal reading'.¹² To Schibanoff's mind, Christine fails to challenge the way in which misogynist medieval commentators traditionally extrapolated *exempla* 'against the female vices of duplicity, pride and fickleness' from the stories of women such as Criseyde.

Christine's defence of women in the *Othéa* might therefore seem to be irredeemably undermined by her own decision to include within it female characters infamous for their lack of virtue. However, an alternative approach to the question of her treatment of women in this text is provided by those scholars who have analysed it from a

⁹ See Curt F. Bühler, ed. *The 'Epistle of Othéa' Translated from the French Text of Christine de Pizan by Stephen Scrope*, Early English Text Society, os 264 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). For full details of other editions of Middle English translations of the *Othéa*, see Kennedy, *Guide*, items 333–5. For a modern translation into English, see Jane Chance, trans., *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othéa to Hector*, Focus Library of Medieval Women (Newburyport: Focus Information Group, 1990), hereafter referred to as *Letter of Othéa*.

¹⁰ See Percy G. C. Campbell, *L'Épître d'Othéa: étude sur les sources de Christine de Pizan* (Paris: Champion, 1924). As recently as the late 1970s, this opinion was shared by certain scholars: see, for example, Enid McLeod, *The Order of the Rose: The Life and Ideas of Christine de Pizan* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1976), 51–3.

¹¹ Christine M. Reno, 'Feminist aspects of Christine de Pizan's *Epistre d'Othéa à Hector*', *Studi Francesi* 71 (1980), 271–6.

¹² Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold'.

rather different angle and have concentrated not on the literal representation of characters in the *Othéa* but on the work's allegorical apparatus which caused such dismay for earlier generations of critics. In attempting to re-appraise Christine's didactic aims in this work, Liliane Dulac and Susan Noakes have argued for a more sympathetic assessment of the *Othéa* which takes account of the literary tastes of the late fourteenth century, tastes which were very different from our own.¹³ Noakes, in particular, in her study of the reading processes involved in the *Othéa*, has argued that modern attempts to read the work as a linear narrative are doomed to failure. In Noakes's view, Christine employs 'anti-mimetic strategies' precisely in order to make the reader more attentive to the advice given in the non-literal 'glose' and 'allegorie' than to the literal, narrative dimension of the work.¹⁴

If we apply the insights gained from looking at the *Othéa* from this critical angle to the question of Christine's defence of women, we can find a solution to the impasse reached by Reno and Schibanoff. Rather than simply analysing the way in which Christine changes the *content* of the stories which she borrowed from her sources, we need to examine the actual *mechanisms* by which those stories are made to signify within the text's allegorical framework. In this way, we shall see how they function as part of a programme for moral edification designed to repudiate what Christine perceived to be the pernicious doctrine of the *Rose*. In order to stress that any blame-worthy actions by female characters in these stories are not to be read in a literal fashion, thereby perpetuating anti-feminist stereotypes, she consistently reiterates the need to re-interpret them allegorically, so refuting both the doctrine and the practice of Jean's text.¹⁵

¹³ See Liliane Dulac, 'Travail allégorique et ruptures du sens chez Christine de Pizan: *L'Epistre Othéa*', in *Continuités et ruptures dans l'histoire et la littérature, Colloque franco-polonais, 9–14 février 1987, Montpellier* (Paris/Geneva: Champion/Slatkine, 1988), 24–32; and Susan Noakes, *Timely Reading: Between Exegesis and Interpretation* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 98–134. See also Judith L. Kellogg, 'Christine de Pizan as chivalric mythographer: *L'Epistre Othéa*', in Jane Chance, ed., *The Mythographic Art* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1990), 100–24; and Gabriella Parussa, 'Le concept d'intertextualité comme hypothèse interprétative d'une œuvre: l'exemple de *L'Epistre Othéa* de Christine de Pizan', *Studi Francesi* 111,3 (1993), 471–93.

¹⁴ Noakes, *Timely Reading*, 129. See also Ignatius, 'Epistre Othéa'.

¹⁵ For the clearest statement of Christine's views on allegory, see Christine M. Reno, 'The Preface to the *Avison-Christine* in ex-Phillipps 128', in Richards et al., *Reinterpreting*, 207–27. See also Armand Strubel, 'Le style allégorique de Christine de Pizan', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 357–72.

How then does Christine tackle the question of foolish love in the *Othéa*? How does she ensure that stories involving female characters will be read as moral and spiritual *exempla* for the reader's instruction, rather than as an attack on the female sex? How does she persuade her reader to engage in allegorical interpretation throughout the work? This chapter will examine, first, Christine's foregrounding of the interpretive task which she expects her reader to undertake in order to learn to go beyond the literal level of the *Othéa*. Secondly, it will then go on to discuss Christine's critique of foolish love, which both counters the teachings of the *Rose* and places love within a broader ethical context. Finally, it will analyse how her treatment of women in the shift from the literal level of the 'texte' to the non-literal levels of the 'glose' and 'allegorie' challenges the way in which works such as the *Rose* employ allegory for misogynist ends.

TRAINING THE READER

To Christine's mind, the *Rose* fails to advocate chastity, despite what its champions might claim in the 'querelle', since it lacks clear ethical instruction in the form of an authoritative voice condemning the pursuit of foolish love. Unlike Jean's text, the ethical programme contained in the *Othéa* is matched by an overtly didactic mode of exposition: Christine here had therefore already put into practice ideas which she would only formulate explicitly in the later 'querelle'. She is all too aware in this work that the uninitiated, lay reader will need help in deciphering its coded allegorical messages:

Affin que ceulz qui ne sont mie clerks poetes puissent entendre en brief la signification des histoires de ce livre, est a savoir que par tout ou les ymages sont en nues, c'est a entendre que ce sont les figures des dieux ou deesses de quoy la letre ensuivant ou livre parle selon la maniere de parler des ancians poetes. (152, lines 20–5)

In marked contrast to the *Rose*, whose expository indeterminacy Christine abhorred, the *Othéa* trains its young knightly reader in the art of allegorical interpretation by providing examples of non-literal readings in its moral and spiritual commentaries. As Noakes has pointed out, Christine signals that these commentaries are merely indicative rather than exhaustive by using phrases such as 'povons prendre' (173, line 4), 'pot bien estre appelle' (175, line 17), etc.¹⁶

¹⁶ Noakes, *Timely Reading*, 98–134.

Presenting these interpretations in a tentative rather than a dogmatic fashion, Christine suggests that they are not the only ones possible and that the reader may supplement them with readings of his own. However, Noakes's conclusion that Christine is concerned with interpretive openendedness for its own sake is not borne out if we place the *Othéa* in the wider context of her critique of the *Rose*. Whilst the 'gloses' and 'allegories' are certainly designed to give the reader a model for his own interpretation of the 'textes', his freedom to interpret these literal stories is curtailed by the fact that Christine only sanctions certain *moralising* types of reading. The plurality of interpretations in the *Othéa* is therefore monologic in the Bakhtinian sense that all of them tend towards the work's over-arching, didactic goal of encouraging the reader to pursue virtue in all domains, whether chivalric, moral or spiritual.¹⁷ In the interests of didacticism, the *Othéa* explicitly sets out Christine's aims in the work, presents the author herself in the dedication to the reader as an initial model for engaging with the text, and offers Othéa as an authoritative voice who is worthy of credence in matters of chivalry. Moreover, in the prefatory 'prologue a allegorie', Christine herself provides an explicit commentary on the multi-layered structure of the *Othéa*, in which she explains how she has expressly designed her work in order to complement Othéa's pagan teachings with lessons imparting Christian moral and spiritual principles. Finally, many of the chapters themselves are directly concerned with providing the reader with expository puzzles and hermeneutical topoi by which to facilitate his training.

The very format of the *Othéa* signals Christine's attempt to present her work as authoritative and serious. As Margaret Ehrhart has observed, its self-glossing apparatus makes it resemble 'the glossed texts through which the great works of the ancients were known in the Middle Ages'.¹⁸ This is particularly true of the earliest manuscript of the work, Paris, BN f. fr. 848, where 'glose' and 'allegorie' are placed in columns alongside the 'texte', as if to suggest that they have been added by commentators over time, rather than composed

¹⁷ See Tzvetan Todorov, ed., and Wlad Godzich, trans., *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 13 (Manchester University Press, 1984). See also S. H. Rigby, *Chaucer in Context* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 18–77.

¹⁸ Margaret J. Ehrhart, 'Christine de Pizan and the Judgment of Paris: a court poet's use of mythographic tradition', in Chance, *The Mythographic Art*, 125–56, 140. See also Parussa, 'Le concept'.

simultaneously by a single author.¹⁹ However, the practical problems of such a layout, coupled with Christine's desire to produce luxury presentation copies of the *Othéa* complete with illuminations, led her to opt for putting the 'glose' and 'allegorie' after the 'texte' in later manuscripts of the work. Such versions as Paris, BN f. fr. 606 and London, BL Harley 4431 are less venerable in appearance, but have the virtue of being more readily understandable to the reader.

In the *Othéa*, Christine's aim is to make the reader focus less on the narrative pleasures of the pagan poetic material contained in the 'texte' than on the moral and spiritual lessons contained in the 'glose' and 'allegorie'. In the dedication to her patron, Louis d'Orléans, Christine does acknowledge that this didactic pill must be sweetened, expressing the hope that he will find 'aucun plaisir' in her work (151, line 6). However, she also emphasises the moralising intention behind the *Othéa* in her description of the work as 'bel a ouyr et meilleur a entendre' (152, line 10). Through a subtle play on words, she stresses the pleasure to be gained from listening to this work ('ouyr'), but insists on the greater importance of perceiving its deeper significance, as indicated by the second verb ('entendre'), whose two possible meanings of 'to hear' or 'to understand' are both exploited at the same time. Christine thus evokes the classic Horatian balance between pleasure and instruction in the work,²⁰ a balance which, in the 'querelle', she deems the *Rose* to have failed to respect in its privileging of pleasure at the expense of instruction.

Like many of her medieval contemporaries, including the author of the *Ovide moralisé* and Boccaccio in his *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, Christine subscribes to the view that the fables of the pagan poets can be useful to a Christian audience; that such fables, if not literally true, are truthful in a figurative and exemplary sense; and that pagan fables hide truth behind an obscure veil.²¹ It is this belief in the possibility of extracting a Christian 'sentence' from pagan material that informs the *Othéa*.²² However, where Christine's work differs from the *Rose*, which also relies heavily on pagan fables, is in

¹⁹ Ignatius, 'Epistre Othéa'.

²⁰ Parussa, 'Le concept', 475.

²¹ See Reno, 'Preface', 223–5.

²² Christine's use of allegory would seem to follow what Dante termed the allegory of the poets, in which the literal sense is not historically true, as opposed to the allegory of the theologians in which the literal has also to be historical: see Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan and sacred history', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 15–30, 19.

providing its readers with a didactic key with which to interpret such material clearly rather than leaving its sense obscure. In order to encourage her reader to use this key to engage with the stories recounted in the *Othéa*, Christine implicitly offers herself as a model for him to follow by inviting him to take inspiration from her own clerkly endeavours. In her dedication to Louis d'Orléans, Christine stresses the paucity of her knowledge but argues that this has been compensated for by her desire to study, which she encourages the reader to emulate. Using the humility topos, Christine describes herself as a 'povre creature' (150, line 18) and as a 'Femme ignorant, de petite estature' (ibid., line 19), confessing that her only real authority to speak comes from her connection with her illustrious father, Thomas de Pizan, whose status she presents as that of an indisputably 'sollempnel clerc' (151, line 3).²³ Yet, despite declaring herself to be bereft of great intelligence, she uses the metaphor of gleaning to show that she has nonetheless been able to acquire some of her father's erudition:

com l'en emble
Espis de ble en glenant en moissons,
Par mi ces champs et coste les buissons. (ibid., lines 15–17)

Christine then proposes her own experience to demonstrate to the reader of the *Othéa* that he too can imitate her search for knowledge among the fields of learning. She is thus able to turn her lowly status as a 'femme indigne' (152, line 3) to good advantage by presenting her call to study as being universally valid for all, male and female, high and low:

Car petite clochete grant voix sonne,
Qui, moult souvent, les plus sages reveille
Et le labour d'estude leur conseille.
(151, lines 25–6 – 152, line 1)

Having proffered herself as a model for her reader in her text, Christine goes on to establish the authority of Othéa as an advisor on chivalry. As Sandra Hindman has pointed out, the format in which Othéa delivers her advice adds to her authority since it is modelled on Plutarch's letter to the emperor Trajan, a well-known classical prototype of the epistolary genre.²⁴ As Othéa explains to Hector, her precise purpose in writing to him is to offer advice that

²³ On Christine's father, see Willard, *Life*, 17–23.

²⁴ See Hindman, *Painting and Politics*, 28–9.

will increase his worth as a knight and a prince, his 'vaillance' and 'prouece' (154, lines 2–3). However, no sooner is Othéa established as an authoritative voice than Christine, in the 'prologue a allegorie', urges her reader to perceive an hierarchical difference between the narrative level of the 'texte', for which Othéa is responsible, and the moral and spiritual commentaries, for which the glossing voice of the author is responsible. This choice of strategy on Christine's part marks a clear distinction from the *Rose* which, to her mind, had employed a multiplicity of voices merely to cover all points on the spectrum of immoral teachings. Instead, in the *Othéa*, all the various levels of meaning combine to inculcate valuable lessons in good conduct. Where there is an hierarchical difference between the 'texte', 'glose' and 'allegorie', this is because, despite her elevated status, Othéa is a pagan whose authority is ultimately circumscribed, as is Virgil's in the *Divina Commedia* for the same reason.²⁵ Like the Cumaean Sibyl whom Othéa herself cites at the end of her work, she explains to Hector that through the power of prophecy, she can indicate to him his own future and the path of chivalric glory that he must follow: 'Je leur lis leçons en chayere / Qui les fait monter jusqu'au [sic] cieulx' (154, lines 24–5). However, it is Christine's voice as *glossatrix* which explicitly states that she is speaking on behalf of 'nous crestiens' and can thus guide the reader along a moral and spiritual path which leads beyond the limitations imposed on Othéa: 'A present nous crestiens, par la grace de Dieu enluminéz de vraye foy, povons ramener a moralité les oppinions des ancians, et sur ce maintes belles allegories pevent estre faites' (155, lines 22–5).

In addition to this distinction between Othéa, as narrator of the 'texte', and Christine, as authorial voice in the 'glose' and 'allegorie', the *Othéa* makes a clear separation between the goddess's addressee Hector, a pagan prince, and Christine's dedicatee Louis d'Orléans, a Christian 'chevalier'. On the one hand, Christine establishes a link between Hector and Louis by describing the latter in the dedication as being 'D'estoc troyan' (150, line 10). As Hindman has argued, this link is further reinforced by the striking iconographical parallels between the two pairs of authors and recipients in the presentation miniatures of the Paris and London manuscripts.²⁶ But on the other hand, Christine signals an important difference between Hector and

²⁵ *Inferno*, I, 121–6 in Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, 3 vols. (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1955–7).

²⁶ Hindman, *Painting and Politics*, 42–5.

Louis since she identifies her patron in Christian terms, lauding him both as a 'Tres haulte flour . . . de Dieu avouee' (150, lines 1–2) and as a 'Piller de foy' (ibid., line 11). Christine, in accordance with her medieval contemporaries such as Honoré de Bouvet and Chaucer,²⁷ stresses that as a pagan, Hector's personal aim is exclusively to pursue 'renomme' (154, line 19), that is, posterity in terms of human history.²⁸ However, once transposed into the moral and spiritual domain, his pursuit of glory in this world can be presented as a model for the pursuit of glory in the next, which is to be undertaken by Christian knights such as Louis and, by extension, all implied readers of the work. Othéa's prophecy discusses Hector's future in terms of already past events: 'Car riens ne diray qui n'aviengne; / S'avenue n'est or t'en souviengne' (155, lines 12–13); Christine's glossing voice in the 'prologue a allegorie' argues that the Christian reader's destiny lies in his own hands and that he should thus 'avoir en continuelle memoire le temps futur, qui est sans fin' (157, lines 13–14), as a reminder of his need to attain eternal salvation.

Apart from informing the reader explicitly in these authorial prefatory parts of the *Othéa* how to navigate through its three-part structure of 'texte', 'glose' and 'allegorie', Christine also employs a number of other devices to draw the reader's attention to the process of interpretation needed to understand the work. In Othéa's preface (chapter 1) and several of the chapters immediately following, Christine uses puzzles which are designed to whet the reader's appetite to find out the true sense of passages whose meaning at first sight seems obscure. Similarly, to assist the reader's task in later sections of the *Othéa*, Christine alludes to classic topoi of interpretation such as the Augustinian husk and kernel, as well as devoting whole chapters of the work to certain characters who are themselves involved in both the laborious and the pleasurable aspects of learning.

Indeed, the theme of interpretation is established from the very beginning of the work since, in Othéa's preface, many of her enjoinders to Hector concern the act of reading. She stresses that her role is to teach the young knight to distinguish those things which are 'necessaires' from those that are 'contraires' (154, lines 1–2);

²⁷ See Alastair J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

²⁸ See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Fama et les preux: nom et renom à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Médiévales* 24 (1993), 35–44.

but, crucially, the ability to discriminate in this way is linked to an ability to read and interpret correctly the lessons in chivalry which she delivers to him. Just as Christine, in the dedication, reveals how she acquired knowledge through 'le labour d'estude' (152, line 1), so Hector must strive to:

[A]cquerir par bonne escole
Le cheval qui par l'air s'envole,
C'est Pegasus le renommé,
Qui de tous vaillans est amé. (154, lines 5–8)

The prize which Hector will win through such 'bonne escole' is expressed as an allegory concerning the horse Pegasus. Yet Othéa herself does not explain this image, neither does Christine in the 'glose' which accompanies the preface. Rather, the *Othéa* here sets its reader the first of many puzzles which he will have to decipher in the course of the work, thus foregrounding the process of learning. This particular puzzle is not fully explained until chapter 5, although a semantic hint is already given in the preface as an aid to the reader. Whilst here Pegasus is qualified by the adjective 'renommé', in chapter 5 he is glossed as the substantive 'renommée', which the knight must pursue: 'Si peut estre notté Perseus et le cheval qui vole bonne renommee que le bon chevalier doit avoir et acquerir par ses bons merites' (166, lines 12–14). Right from the start of the *Othéa*, Christine employs an allegorical mode of expression which encourages the reader to engage with the problems of reading, to learn to identify the difference between the literal, moral and spiritual meanings, and so to acquire the competence in interpretation needed to profit from its valuable lessons.

Once the reader is well launched on his interpretive journey, Christine uses another key topos to remind him of the need to benefit from his scholarly endeavours and to symbolise interpretation and its significance for him. This topos occurs at the midpoint of the work, in chapter 49, which presents the story of Juno, a chapter that Hector must interpret in a non-literal fashion as an allegory of the pursuit of riches:

De Juno ja trop ne te chaille,
Se le noyel mieulx que l'eschaille
D'onneur desires a avoir,
Car mieulx vault proece qu'avoir. (221, lines 18–21)

The *Othéa* applies to a pagan text the commonplace image of the

husk and the kernel which St Augustine had originally devised to express the need to read scriptural texts for their allegorical rather than their literal sense.²⁹ In this specific instance, the topos is used in connection with Juno, goddess of wealth, to stress the necessity of transposing the pursuit of riches on to a non-worldly plane and to remind the reader of his task throughout the work. This topos neatly encapsulates Christine's employment of pagan fables in the service of Christian morality and her desire to train the reader to struggle to grasp the moral of a work rather than simply being distracted by its surface level of meaning.

In order to train the reader in the art of interpretation, the *Othéa* provides him with salutary reminders of the task of learning which he must fulfil, and includes stories which illustrate characters undertaking precisely this kind of task. Two examples in particular demonstrate aspects of learning which Christine outlined in the dedication: both 'le labour [d'estude]' and 'aucun plaisir' which are involved in reading her work. Chapter 28, the story of Cadmus, highlights the laborious side of study in its emphasis on the 'grant peine' which the hero needed to vanquish the dragon at the fountain (196, line 5). The 'glose' stresses that this feat is not to be read simply as a straight chivalric 'aventure'; rather, it is a symbol of clerkly application to one's books: 'C'est a entendre science et sagece qui toudis sourt; le serpent est notté pour la peine et travail qu'il couvient a l'estudiant dompter ains qu'il ait science acquise' (ibid., lines 10–12).³⁰ The 'glose' similarly goes on to make explicit the usefulness of Cadmus as a symbolic example for others, since in his own time he served as a teacher to his contemporaries: 'Et dit la fable que il meismes devint serpent, qui est a entendre que il fu maistre et corrigeur des autres' (ibid., lines 12–14). In referring to Cadmus in this way, the *Othéa* simultaneously alludes to the role that Christine, as clerkly authority in the 'gloses' and 'allegories', is playing in the text for the knightly reader: 'Si veult dire Othéa que le bon chevalier doit amer et honnourer les clerks letréz, qui sont fondéz en science' (ibid., lines 14–16).

²⁹ St Augustine states, quoting 2 Corinthians 3:6, that '“the letter kills, but the spirit gives life”' (*De Doctrina Christiana*, 141).

³⁰ On Christine's use of the story of Cadmus as a symbol of clerkly endeavour in the *Mutacion* see Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Christine de Pizan and classical mythology: Some examples from the *Mutacion de Fortune*', in Zimmermann and De Rentis, *City*, 3–14.

Ulysses playing chess in chapter 83 illustrates instead the pleasurable aspect of learning which Christine had evoked in her dedication.³¹ This is his second appearance in the *Othéa*, the first being in chapter 19 where the tale of how the Giant Cyclops' single eye was stolen by the wily Ulysses is allegorised as a lesson on the dangers of leaving oneself defenceless against sin. However, the import of the story of Ulysses in chapter 83 is not made immediately apparent. In the 'texte', Othéa proposes him as an example of someone involved in a worthwhile pursuit, both 'soubtille et honneste': the game of chess (267, line 9–10).³² The 'glose' of this chapter equally underscores the pleasure that such a pursuit can procure, for chess and other similar activities are deemed 'gieux soubtilz et moult beaulx' (ibid., line 5). If the link between the playing of such games and the importance of learning is not yet clear in the reader's mind, the 'allegorie' removes all doubt, for chess is presented here as a figure for reading the Scriptures, the very highest material one could study: 'Les gieux Ulixes pevent estre entendus que, quant l'esperit chevalereux sera lassé d'aourer et d'estre en contemplacion, il pourra bien soy esbatre a lire les saintes escriptures' (ibid., lines 12–14). The game of chess is therefore employed as part of Christine's overall call to learn: whilst stressing the enjoyable element of the activity, she brings to the reader's attention the profit to be gained from a close engagement with her work.

FORSAKING FOOLISH LOVE

If the *Othéa* constantly emphasises the need to read beyond the literal level of the work, this need is particularly urgent in those stories of erotic love which are used to inculcate moral truths. In chapter 82 on Hermaphroditus, Christine explicitly sets out the potential problem that such a choice of material poses. This story tells of the pursuit by a female character of a male object of desire and is therefore, ostensibly, a tale of a woman's lust. In the 'glose', Christine reiterates the need to analyse this kind of work correctly, that is, in such a way as to read below its literal and libidinous surface: 'Et pour ce que la matiere d'amours est plus delitable a ouyr que d'autre, [les clerks soubtilz philosophes] firent communement leurs

³¹ Noakes, *Timely Reading*, 123–4.

³² See G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 1926), 326, n. 3, for examples of moralisations of chess in medieval sermons.

ficcions sus amours pour estre plus delitables mesmement aux rudes, qui n'y prennent fors l'escorce, et plus agreable aux soubtilz, qui en succent la liqueur' (266, lines 2–5). As before, Christine uses the familiar image of the husk, but juxtaposes it this time not with its kernel but with the sweet juice inside, which the reader must desire to possess. She spells out to the reader that he should not interpret this story literally as the erotic pursuit of man by woman, but as an allegory of giving comfort and succour to those in need. But how does Christine ensure that other such stories of love can be safely used in the service of the young knight's ethical instruction? How can she prevent her reader from deriving a misogynist lesson about female vice from stories of this kind?

The *Othéa* employs numerous pagan fables in order to deliver an unequivocal rejection of foolish love. The interpretations which Christine provides of this type of story are intended to promote similarly moral interpretations from the reader. In so doing, Christine implicitly criticises Jean literary methods since, in her opinion, his work failed to condemn the hedonistic and egotistical Amant, whose final exploit is his rape and impregnation of the Rose. Even more clearly, the *Othéa* attacks Jean de Meung's view of love, both as a general doctrine and as expressed through a set of topoi, for it uses many of the same erotic stories as he did, but interprets them for an indisputably moral end. Thus, the *Othéa* re-tells the stories of Narcissus and Pygmalion to criticise misuse of the sense of sight, which is the mechanism by which love takes hold in Jean's text. It also recounts the tales of Adonis and Actaeon so as to condemn idleness, a key personification in the *Rose* and a sin which characterises the lifestyle of those knights who indulge in activities such as hunting, especially when linked to the pursuit of love. Finally, in order to inveigh against foolish lovers such as Amant in the *Rose*, who erroneously give credence to dreams which hold out promises of erotic fulfilment, the *Othéa* relates the story of Paris. However, Christine expands her critique of the *Rose's* conception of love by placing these amorous matters into an explicitly ethical context of the kind which Jean de Meung failed to provide. The *Othéa* attacks those knights whose personal pursuit of erotic satisfaction produces disastrous effects on the body politic as a whole, an attack which is focused principally on the figure of Paris, who abandons his chivalric duties for the pleasures of love and thereby brings about the destruction of an entire kingdom.

Christine conducts a persistent critique throughout the *Othéa* of those lovers whose passion is excessive and, ultimately, fatal. A typical example of such a passion is that of Hero and Leander (chapter 42). The ‘texte’ of this story counsels against risking one’s life for the transitory pleasures of the body:

N’ayez pas si cher ta plaisance,
Que trop mettes en grant balance
Ta vie, que tu dois amer;
Leander en peri en mer. (212, lines 4–7)

The ‘glose’ is even more specific about Leander’s error, underlining the excessive nature of his passion: ‘Leander fu un demoisel *qui trop amoit de grant amour*’ (ibid., line 9, emphasis added), a phrase which is often repeated in these tales of love. The object of his desire is Hero, on whom his eyes must constantly feed, so he risks his life each time he swims the channel between them in order that he might ‘[veoir] sa dame’ (ibid., line 12). On the night of his death, Leander is afflicted by uncontrollable longing, being ‘contraint de trop grant desir’ (ibid., line 16), a powerful emotion which is matched by Hero’s exaggerated reaction on seeing her lover’s dead body floating by on the waves: ‘adont estrainte de trop merveilleuse douleur se geta en mer, et en embrassant le corps, peri et fu noyee’ (ibid., lines 20–1). Both the moral and the ‘autorité’ of the ‘glose’ stress the dangers of subordinating one’s existence to the rule of love: the ‘bon chevalier’ must at all costs avoid putting the pursuit of the ‘delit du corps’ before the preservation of his life, and, most significantly, of his soul.

In the story of Hero and Leander, an important clue is given as to why Christine condemns their love. The ‘glose’ of this chapter identifies misuse of the sense of sight as the cause of the two lovers’ loss of control over their passions. Christine is clearly alluding here to the well-known medieval commonplace of the *gradus amoris*, familiar from both the lyric and romance, according to which sight is the first stage of passion since the eyes are the opening of the body through which love will penetrate into the heart.³³ In order to underscore the seriousness with which she regards this matter, Christine does not limit discussion of the topos of sight to a single example but instead devotes to it a whole series of chapters, including two classic instances of the error of the eyes: Narcissus and

³³ See Lionel J. Friedman, ‘Gradus Amoris’, *Romance Philology* 19,2 (1965), 167–77.

Pygmalion, both of whom feature prominently in the *Rose*.³⁴ However, unlike the presentation of these two characters in Jean's text, Christine's treatment of Narcissus and Pygmalion leaves nothing to chance regarding the moral conclusion which can be drawn from their stories.³⁵

The impact of the story of Narcissus (chapter 16) is all the more heightened by its position immediately after the story of Penthesilea, the famous Amazon queen (chapter 15), which demonstrates how sight is used for beneficial purposes when it is not motivated by foolish passion.³⁶ Penthesilea's love for Hector is presented as righteous in that she seeks not to gratify her physical desires but rather to pay homage to his 'renomme'.³⁷ In the 'texte' of this chapter, which foretells to Hector his own future death, Othéa stresses that he should cherish Penthesilea in recognition of her compassion at his fate, since her love is of a pure and virtuous kind. The purity of her emotions is proven by the fact that Penthesilea does not misuse the sense of sight, because although she comes to Troy with the specific aim of *seeing* Hector, her eyes behold only his corpse: 'celle l'amoit de tres grant amour, et des parties d'Orient vint a Troye ou temps du grant siege *pour Hector veoir*. Mais quant mort le trouva, dolente en fu oultre mesure; et a tout grant ost de damoiselles moult chevalereusement vengia vigoureusement sa mort' (180, lines 11–15, emphasis added). The 'allegorie' insists that Penthesilea's grief is not motivated by a foolish love of Hector but by charity (ibid., lines 24–6). Through the example of the Amazon queen, Christine thus explicitly proposes charity both as a worthy form of love that the reader should cultivate in his own heart, and as an alternative to the

³⁴ For Narcissus, see *Rose*, lines 1569–72, and for Pygmalion, see *Rose*, lines 20781–21184. For studies of these characters, see Thomas D. Hill, 'Narcissus, Pygmalion and the castration of Saturn: two mythological themes in the *Roman de la Rose*', *Studies in Philology* 71,4 (1974), 404–26; and David F. Hult, 'The allegorical fountain: Narcissus in the *Roman de la Rose*', *Romanic Review* 72 (1981), 125–48.

³⁵ Although it is of course Guillaume de Lorris who recounts the story of Narcissus in the *Rose*, Christine herself makes no distinction between the two authors of the text for the purposes of blaming its lack of moral rectitude. See *Débat*, 135, lines 646–50.

³⁶ For a different view of the significance of the Amazon queen for Christine, see Kevin Brownlee, 'Hector and Penthesilea in the *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*: Christine de Pizan and the politics of myth', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 69–82.

³⁷ Reno, 'Feminist aspects', 272–3, rightly points out that in Christine's version of the story of Penthesilea, the Amazon queen does not come to seek Hector in the hope of having his baby, as Boccaccio, her source for this story, had maintained: see *De Claris Mulieribus*, 134–7.

concupiscence which, in the 'querelle', she attacks the *Rose* for encouraging.

In contrast to this virtuous form of love, which springs from Penthesilea's sorrow at the sight of Hector's dead body, the story of Narcissus reveals the perilous use to which the eyes can be put, since he falls in love with his own image which he has glimpsed in a fountain. His folly is glossed as 'orgueil' (182, line 2), which causes him to privilege the evidence of his eyes above all else.³⁸ Christine underlines the link between the act of seeing and the idea of self-obsession through repetition of the verb *se mirer*:

il fu si amoureux et assotis de lui meismes que il en mourut apres que il fu miréz en la fontaine. C'est a entendre l'oultrecuidance de lui meismes ou il se mira. Pour ce deffent au bon chevalier que il ne se mire point en ses bienfais, par quoy il en soit oultre cuidéz. (181, lines 19–23)

The 'allegorie' employs the example of Narcissus to remind the reader of the need to save his soul and to turn away from the corporeal and the material. By stressing the corruptibility of the body, using terms such as 'ordures' and 'nettoyateurs' to describe the operations of the flesh, the 'allegorie' calls on the reader to reject the sordid object of foolish love (182, lines 7–8).

If Narcissus represents the danger of focusing erotically on oneself through an injudicious use of the eyes, Pygmalion (chapter 22) is an instance of excessive attachment to the physical beauty of another person, since he falls in love with the statue of a woman which he has created for his own amorous purposes.³⁹ Othéa, in the 'texte', exhorts Hector not to follow Pygmalion's example, using the verb *assoter*, which itself recalls the chapter on Narcissus ('assotis de lui meismes' 181, line 20): 'Ne t'assottes pas de l'image / Pymalyon, se tu es sage' (189, lines 11–12). Through its connotations of folly, this verb stresses the moral danger into which the protagonist places himself through the act of seeing. The 'glose' continues its attack on Pygmalion's misuse of his eyes by revealing that the reason he creates his statue is because he has scorned the women of Sidon for what he perceived to be their lack of beauty (*ibid.*, lines 17–19). Despite the fact that the image which he has sculpted is only of

³⁸ On the eyes of Narcissus in the *Rose*, see John V. Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose': A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton University Press, 1969), 93–5.

³⁹ On the treatment of Pygmalion in the *Rose*, see *ibid.*, 228–38; and Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 316–37.

stone, he nonetheless responds to it in the manner of any foolish lover, emitting 'plaintes et clamours a piteux souspirs' (ibid., line 22). Pygmalion's desire to possess the image is sanctioned by Venus, the epitome of lustfulness repudiated by Christine in chapter 7 of the *Othéa*,⁴⁰ who gives him a sign of her consent by igniting the branch held in her hand. This allusion to fire is then immediately echoed in the description of Pygmalion warming the statue with his own body, which is a metaphor for his own lustful desires in seeking to bring the statue to life. The 'allegorie' expands on a number of the terms used in the 'glose' in order to point out how they can be read to yield a spiritual lesson. Pygmalion, in his besotted state, is unable to perceive that the image he has created is an embodiment of concupiscence. Furthermore, he misreads the fire completely as a sign of assent, when it should in fact be read as a metonymic figure of Hell: 'De luxure dit saint Jerome en un Epistre: "O feu d'enfer, de qui la buche est gloutonnie, la flamme, c'est orgueil, les flameches sont corrompues paroles, la fumee, c'est mauvaise renommee, la cendre, c'est povreté, et la fin, c'est le tourment d'enfer"' (190, lines 24–6 – 191, line 1). The example of Pygmalion, whose eyes fix on the body and whose thoughts are inflamed by love, is a particularly unsuitable model for the young knight, who, even if he does love, must not forget that his proper pursuit is that of arms. As the moral of the 'glose' states: 'le bon chevalier ne doit estre assotez de si fait ymage en telle maniere que il enlait a suivre le mestier d'armes, au quel il est obligéz par l'ordre de chevalerie' (190, lines 16–18). In the examples of Narcissus and Pygmalion, Christine thus uses the interpretive framework of the *Othéa* to give a reading *in malo* of two key *exempla* from the *Rose*, a work which, to her mind, fails to condemn the misuse of the sense of sight.

Christine's attack on young knights who indulge in pursuits such as hunting is related to the whole problem of idleness, an attribute which, in the *Rose*, is a prerequisite for entry into the garden of Deduit.⁴¹ Once Amant has been let into the garden by Oiseuse, who personifies the vice of idleness, he engages thereafter in his quest for

⁴⁰ In the sections dealing with the influence of the planets on human lives, Christine allegorises the lustful power of Venus as the source of all dysfunction in the sublunary sphere: 'Venus est mere de tous maux, la fontaine de tous vices et la veine d'iniquité qui l'homme met hors la grace de Dieu et le met en sa hayne' (170, lines 12–14). See also Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Sexualité et politique: le mythe d'Actaeon chez Christine de Pizan', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 83–90.

⁴¹ See *Rose*, lines 522–640.

the *Rose* which culminates in an attack on her chastity.⁴² In the *Othéa*, Christine uses the stories of Adonis and Actaeon (chapters 65 and 69, respectively) to exemplify the dangers of idleness, and in particular, the idle activity of hunting when linked to the vice of lust. In order to emphasise the self-indulgent nature of this activity, Christine places a chapter on Diana, the goddess of hunting, before these two stories. Chapter 63 devoted to Diana is brief but trenchant: the ‘texte’ expresses its condemnation of ‘chacierie’ by using such terms as ‘deduit’ and ‘amuser’ to dissuade the knight from engaging in such a pastime:

Ne suis mie trop le deduit
De Dyane, car il n’aduit
Aux poursuivans chevalerie
Eulx amuser en chacierie. (239, lines 21–4)

The ‘glose’ repeats these terms, adding that hunting is linked to idleness (‘oyseuse’, 240, line 5), which can lead to all kind of dangers, although in this chapter no specific instances of such dangers are given. The ‘allegorie’ provides no further clue as to what other type of idle activity is hinted at here, and instead stresses the need for the knight to be well occupied in ‘aucune bonne exortacion’ (ibid., lines 9–10). Rather, it is in the stories of Adonis and Actaeon that Christine develops more fully her condemnation of the vice of idleness, as it relates to the pastime of hunting.

The ‘texte’ of the story of Adonis (chapter 65) immediately employs the term ‘deduit’, used in the example of Diana and redolent of the garden in the *Rose*, adding the verb ‘amer’ to signal the extent to which the young man is addicted to this activity:

Se trop grant volenté te chace
A moult amer deduit de chace,
D’Adonius au moins te recort,
Qui fu par le porc sanglier mort. (241, lines 16–19)

The verse describes how the desire to hunt is something which the young man cannot control. The word ‘chace’ is used twice: the first time as a verb, meaning the obsessive urge which goads Adonis on; and the second, as a substantive, to designate the actual object of that urge. In the ‘glose’, Christine shows how Adonis’ predilection for hunting fierce beasts leads him to ignore the dangers associated

⁴² On Oiseuse, see Fleming, *The ‘Roman de la Rose’*, 73–82.

with such creatures, despite the warnings of Venus, his lover.⁴³ The 'allegorie' reinforces this reading, stating that Adonis should be seen as a symbol of the persistent sinner, a 'serf de corrupcion' (242, line 11). In this chapter, then, the specific dangers of hunting are spelt out for the reader but it is the story of Actaeon, four chapters later, which explicitly links the activity of the hunt to the pursuit of passion.

In chapter 69, the term 'serf' (slave) in the story of Adonis becomes, retrospectively, a pun on Actaeon, who of course was turned into a 'cerf' (stag) for having spied on Diana, as the actual spelling of this word in the 'texte' indicates:

Se bien aimes chiens et oyseaulx,
D'Antheon, li gent damoiseaulx,
Qui serf devint, bien te souviengne,
Et gard qu'autant ne t'en aviengne. (246, lines 9–12)

Like Adonis, Actaeon is a young man whose fault is an excessive fondness for hunting: 'trop amoit chiens et oyseaulx' (ibid., lines 14–15). In the course of his pursuit of wild beasts, Actaeon comes across Diana in her woodland bath, at whom he gazes lustfully before being punished by her for fear that he will boast about having seen her naked. Unwittingly, his devotion to the activity most favoured by Diana leads him into direct contact with her, thus causing his death. In this respect, the command not to follow Diana, as expressed in chapter 63, materialises into a literal event with dire consequences for the hunter. Yet, unlike Adonis, Actaeon, according to the 'glose', shows some signs of contrition for what he has done; tears roll down his face 'a grosses gouttes', since, as a stag, he can no longer actually speak (247, lines 7–8). Neither is he simply killed ('occis'), as Adonis was; rather, he is 'martiréz', a term which suggests the idea of sacrifice (247, lines 9–10). The 'glose' stresses nonetheless that the young man fell prey to 'oysiveté', that is, 'delit de son corps

⁴³ For Jean de Meung's treatment of the story of Adonis, see *Rose*, lines 15629–721. Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose'*, 187 and D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 263, both point out that in fact a long tradition exists of glossing Adonis' disobedience towards Venus as positive, in that he refuses to hunt rabbits (with their sexual connotation of female genitalia) and instead turns to the pursuit of nobler beasts such as boar, which can represent the pursuit of charity. A later manuscript of the *Othéa*, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 9392, executed by Jean Miélot for the Burgundian Duke Philippe le Bon in 1461, similarly treats the story of Adonis as an *exemplum in bono*: see ff. 68–9. For an analysis of this manuscript see Mombello, *La tradizione manoscritta*, 147–52; Campbell, *L'Epistre Othéa*, 58–62; and Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Illumination as reception: Jean Miélot's re-working of the *Epistre Othéa*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 260–71.

et en deduit de chace', thus explicitly associating the state of idleness, the vice of lust and the act of hunting (ibid., lines 13–14).⁴⁴ However, the 'allegorie' of this chapter indicates that the example of Actaeon can be useful, if taken as an allegory of the repentant soul: 'Antheon, qui cerf devint, povons entendre le vray penitent qui pecheur souloit estre, or a maté sa propre char et faite servir a l'esperit et pris l'estat de penitence' (ibid., lines 21–3). This transformation from sinner to penitent had already been suggested by the signs of the young man's contrition given in the 'glose': his tears. A final element in the 'allegorie,' which has the effect of letting the reader see that which Actaeon, the sinner, could not immediately perceive, is the connection between the birds ('oiseaulx') mentioned in the verse, one of the objects of Actaeon's excessive predilection for hunting, and those used, in the 'allegorie', to represent the penitence of the soul:

Et dit saint Augustin sus le Psautier que penitence est un fais bien aysié et une charge legiere; et ne doit estre appelee fais d'omme chargé mais esles d'oyseau volant, car, ainsi comme les oyseaulx portent en terre la charge de leurs esles et leurs esles les portent ou ciel, aussi, se nous portons en terre la charge de penitence, elle nous portera ou ciel. (247, lines 23–6 – 248, lines 1–3)

Just like Pygmalion, who misread the sign of fire given to him by Venus, so Actaeon misunderstands the sign of the birds which indicate, too late for him but not for the reader, freedom from sin. In attacking idleness through the theme of hunting in the stories of Diana, Adonis and Actaeon, Christine therefore condemns the idle lifestyle which the *Rose*, in her view, presents to the reader as a legitimate and alluring goal to pursue.

But it is perhaps in her discussion of the dream of Paris that Christine strikes at the very heart of what she perceives to be Jean's doctrine of love. Indeed, Paris in the *Othéa* functions as a chivalric counterpart to the clerkly Amant in the *Rose*, for he too is presented with a dream which tempts him with erotic fulfilment.⁴⁵ Moreover, the actual content of each of their dreams involves a choice in which

⁴⁴ See Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Sexualité'.

⁴⁵ On the medieval theory of dreams, which is derived principally from Macrobius' influential *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, see Anthony C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 1976); Renate Blumenfeld, 'Remarques sur songe/mensonge', *Romania* 101 (1980), 385–90; and Stephen F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

each of them chooses unwisely in opting for the world of foolish love. Where the *Othéa* differs from the *Rose*, however, is in condemning unequivocally, through the figure of Paris, the foolish lover's lack of judiciousness in seeking to gratify his unreasonable desires.⁴⁶ Paris's bad judgment in his dream is revealed in a detailed allegory in which the three goddesses Pallas, Juno and Venus offer him a choice between the gifts of chivalric prowess, wealth, or love, which they can respectively bestow on him in return for his judgment as to which of them is the most splendid and powerful (chapter 73). Venus' imminent victory is signalled by the fact that unlike that of the other two goddesses, her speech is described as being 'par moult amoureuses paroles' (253, line 24), thus underlining her seductive powers. In this way, Christine explicitly condemns Venus in the *Othéa* as a personification of dangerous lust which leads young men into error, whereas Jean's goddess of love is presented as a much-needed ally in Amant's final assault on the castle of the Rose's chastity (*Rose*, lines 20681–766). Furthermore, Christine signals how central this episode is to the whole of her attack on foolish love in the *Othéa* by showing that Venus is to the feckless Paris what Othéa is to the noble Hector. Venus' speech reveals that her teaching on amorous affairs is the very antithesis of that which Christine's work seeks to give to its reader, since she subverts two of the key ideas which were presented in Othéa's preface to Hector. First, Venus uses the term 'escole' to describe her influence on others, a term identical to that employed by Othéa to describe the learning process which Hector and, by extension, the reader must undergo in the course of Christine's work. Whereas Othéa's aim is to teach 'prudence' as befits a knight, Venus can only impart the arts of love. Secondly, the effects of Venus' teaching on human beings are described as a series of perplexing contraries: '“Je suis celle qui tient escole d'amours et de joliveté, et qui les folz fais estre sages et les sages fais foloier; et les riches fais mendier et les exilléz enrichir”' (253, lines 25–6 – 254, line 1);⁴⁷ whereas, in her preface to Hector, Othéa had stressed that she would show the young knight:

⁴⁶ On the dream-vision in the *Rose* see Fleming, *The 'Roman de la Rose'*, 54–5.

⁴⁷ Of course, though Christine does not acknowledge it, Raison's description of foolish love is very similar to that given by Venus in the *Othéa*: see *Rose*, lines 4263–328. A possible common source for this series of contraries found in both Christine's and Jean de Meung's works is the *De Planctu Naturae*, Metre Five: see Alan of Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan, *Medieval Sources in Translation*, 26 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 149–53.

Les choses qui sont neccessaires
 A haulte vaillance et contraires
 Al'opposite de proueece. (154, lines 1–3)

In other words, not only are Venus' operations contrary, they are also the diametrical opposite of the good lesson which both Hector and the Christian reader should learn. Rather, it is Pallas' offer to give 'armes aux chevaliers et sciences aux clerks' (253, line 19), an offer rejected by Paris, which corresponds to that made by Othéa to Hector, for it involves giving to every individual what is strictly necessary in order for him to assume his allotted public role as either knight or clerk.⁴⁸ In aligning himself with the camp devoted to the pursuit of love rather than to the pursuit of chivalric virtue, Paris judges foolishly, as the 'allegorie' sums up, stating quite bluntly that '[il] . . . jugia follement' (254, line 14). Unlike Amant in the *Rose*, whose decision to pursue foolish love Jean never explicitly denounces, Paris is held up by Christine as an irredeemably bad example which the young reader ought to shun.

It is not only for his personal failings that the *Othéa* condemns Paris. Indeed, as Christine points out, his selfish actions ultimately led his own country into peril, as the 'glose' of chapter 73 states: 'Et adont Paris donna sa sentence et renonça a chevalerie et a sagece et a richece pour Venus . . . , pour la quelle achoison fu puis Troye destruite' (ibid., lines 4–7, emphasis added). Christine therefore places her attack on foolish love and her critique of Jean de Meung's views in a wider ethical dimension, one usually explored in the 'mirror for princes' genre.⁴⁹ Works in this genre commonly argue that an individual's personal morals should form the basis of his public and political role as a ruler, an Aristotelian concept which was popularised in the medieval period by the influential *De Regimine Principum* of Giles of Rome (also known as Egidio Colonna).⁵⁰ In Giles's words, the prince cannot expect to rule wisely over others if he cannot first exert self-rule over his own passions: 'qui vult gouvernier autrui, il

⁴⁸ See Ehrhart, 'Judgement of Paris', 144.

⁴⁹ For general studies of the 'mirror' genre, see Lester K. Born, 'The perfect prince: a study in thirteenth and fourteenth century ideals', *Speculum* 3 (1928), 470–504; and Diane Bornstein, 'Reflections of political theory and political fact in fifteenth-century mirrors for the prince', in J. B. Bessinger and R. R. Rayno, eds., *Medieval Studies for Lillian Herlands Hornstein* (New York University Press, 1976), 77–85.

⁵⁰ On the influence of Giles of Rome on political writers in the late Middle Ages, see Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's ethical microcosm and political macrocosm', in Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 135–62.

doit primierement savoir gouvernien soi meïsmes'.⁵¹ Christine's own 'mirrors for princes', such as the *Paix* and the *Policie*, are heavily indebted to Giles for his view that the conduct of the individual in the personal microcosm has repercussions for the health of government in the political macrocosm.⁵² In the *Policie*, for example, Christine outlines her theory of good government by devoting chapters not only to the public virtues of liberality, pity, 'debonnairété', and justice, but also to the private virtue of fleeing lust.⁵³ Similarly, in the *Paix*, Christine condemns lust as one of the most insidious of vices, particularly in individuals who are responsible for the well-being of the state:

[c'est une] certaine chose qui trop puet empirer valeur de grant seigneur et de toute notable personne qui y seroit envelopéz, c'est assavoir delices de corps et toutes chose de volupté, comme les occupacions en telz besongnes soient vaines, non licites et deshonnorables, et qui ameurrissent et derompent toutes bonnes euvres en personne qui s'y amuse, est grant meschief quant tel vice est fichié en homme à qui affiere grant gouvernement.⁵⁴

The *Othéa*, though very different from these later works by Christine in terms of its methods of exposition, is none the less informed by the same ethical principles.⁵⁵ As Hindman has pointed out, the work opens with an evocation of the four cardinal virtues, which had been the cornerstone of the advice on 'bonne pollicie' (156, line 13) given to princes from Giles of Rome onwards.⁵⁶ She goes on to argue that '[Christine] believed that the kingdom of

⁵¹ Since no modern edition of the Latin original exists, I have quoted from an edition of Giles of Rome's text in medieval French, which is possibly the form in which Christine is most likely to have known it: *Li Livres du gouvernement des rois: A XIIIth Century French Version of Egidio Colonna's treatise De Regimine Principum*, ed. Samuel Paul Molenaer, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1899), 6.

⁵² See Willard, *Life*, 116 and *passim*; Kate Langdon Forhan, 'Reflecting heroes: Christine de Pizan and the mirror tradition', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 189–96.

⁵³ *Policie*, 42–8, 48–51, 51–4, 60–3, and 93–5, respectively.

⁵⁴ *Paix*, 173–4.

⁵⁵ See Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Miroir du prince, miroir d'amour: *L'Epistre Othéa* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', in Ribémont, *Sur le chemin*, 25–44. See also Gabriella Parussa, 'Instruire les chevaliers et conseiller les princes: *L'Epistre Othéa* de Christine de Pizan', in *Studi di storia della civiltà letteraria francese, Mélanges offerts à Lionello Sozzi par le Centre d'études franco-italiennes, Universités de Savoie et de Turin*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque Franco Simone, XXV (Paris: Champion, 1996), 129–55.

⁵⁶ Hindman, *Painting and Politics*, 51. In her view, it is principally the illustrations in the manuscripts supervised by Christine herself which deliver these political lessons, in the form of precise iconographical references to the contemporary struggle for power being waged among the French royal dukes.

France might falter, as had that of Troy, without the practice of those virtues required for good government.⁵⁷ Many of the actual stories in the *Othéa* are therefore concerned to give the reader lessons in virtuous conduct which are also applicable to the broader political domain, such as the need for justice (chapter 4), mercy (chapter 86), contempt for flatterers (chapter 48) and so on. But there is more: the *Othéa* also shares Giles's emphasis on first ruling oneself, and specifically one's passions, before presuming to rule others. Temperance, for example, is allegorised as the need to 'restraintre et appaisier les meurs de concupiscence . . . et aussi desputer les delices charnelles et louange mondaine' (159, lines 20–3), whilst Justice is glossed as the necessity to 'corriger ses meismes deffaulx . . . et puis homme ainsi correct peut bien estre et doit corriger des autres hommes' (164, lines 1–3). As in the *Policie*, the *Othéa* identifies ethical conduct in love as crucial for ethical conduct in other spheres of activity such as government. Christine therefore reserves particular blame for Paris as an example of those knights who fail to observe the strictures of chastity, to the detriment both of their souls and of their countries.⁵⁸

In three different chapters devoted to Paris, the *Othéa* undertakes a systematic indictment of his actions from an ethical and political perspective. Firstly, Othéa upbraids him for pursuing his selfish and perilous desires on the whim of a dream (chapter 68). In this chapter, she advises the reader not to emulate Paris' actions, which were based on an 'avision' which she dismisses as being tantamount to a 'fole illusion' (245, lines 2–3). As the 'glose' makes explicit, it is because Paris first dreamed of kidnapping Helen that he then went ahead and did so in reality: 'Pour ce que Paris ot songié que en Grece raviroit Helayne, fu fait grant armee et envoyee de Troye en Grece, ou Paris ravi Helayne' (ibid., lines 7–9). Paris is thus guilty of delighting too much in the prospect held out by his dream to judge properly whether the reward it promises is worth the price he will have to pay for it. If his dream represents an example of individual bad judgment, it also raises the whole ethical question of personal responsibility, since it promises individual pleasure but at the price of political disaster.

Secondly, Othéa explicitly condemns Paris for the fact that his

⁵⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁵⁸ On such examples of *milites amoris* – knights who forsake chivalry for foolish love – see Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, 408–10.

obsessive wish to pursue his own erotic pleasures ultimately undermines the virtues such as strength and valour which are required of a knight or a prince (chapter 75). He fails utterly to conform to Othéa's recommendation, outlined in an earlier chapter (47), that a knight should only pursue a love which is moderate and which, most importantly, will not interfere with the more fitting pursuit of arms:

De Cupido, se jeune et cointes
Es, me plait assez que t'acointes.
Par mesure comment qu'il aille,
Il plait bien au dieu de bataille. (218, lines 21–4)

In the 'glose' accompanying this 'texte', Christine adds her own cautious approval of love undertaken in the true spirit of 'chevalerie' provided that the beloved is 'honoree et sage' (219, line 2). However, in chapter 75, Othéa declares that Paris is less fit to lead a country into war than to 'Soy deduire es beaulx bras s'amie', a description which sums up his unsuitability as a warrior (256, line 5). The 'glose' of this chapter uses alliteration to underline the fact that Paris is more disposed towards 'amours' than to 'armes', here placed in opposition since the former has the effect, when taken to extremes, of cancelling out the latter (*ibid.*, line 7).

Finally, Othéa criticises Paris' desire to act on his dream and to pursue foolish love because of its wider political effects (chapter 43). The *Othéa* thus stresses the continuity of action from the individual to the political since the 'texte' insists that Helen should have been given back to the Greeks. The 'allegorie' of this story is used to exemplify the commandment "'Tu ne desireras point la femme de ton prochain"' (214, line 10), a commandment which is particularly pertinent to Paris as an individual. However, the 'glose' generalises the story's import by indicating that the Trojans, as a body politic, are led into error by condoning Paris' actions: 'Et pour ce que riens n'en voldrent faire les Troyens s'en ensuivi le grant meschief qui puis leur advient' (213, line 23 – 214, line 2). Both the 'texte' and the 'glose', with their emphasis on political and ethical issues such as 'desloyauté' (213, line 17), therefore underscore the point that such 'folie encommencée' (214, line 3) by an individual in the name of love should not be allowed to disrupt the common good.

The critique of foolish love which the *Othéa* undertakes encourages the young knight to read these stories of fatal passion not for the narrative pleasures which they afford but rather for the moral and spiritual significance which they contain. Christine's work does not

simply provide an implicit repudiation of the *Rose's* view of love. It also offers a positive moral alternative which allows the reader to turn his mind to higher things: the eyes should be directed towards the contemplation of the soul rather than the pleasures of the body; the idle pastime of hunting should be given up in favour of some more profitable activity; and reasoned judgment should be preferred over dreams which promise to fulfil immoral desires. Moreover, the *Othéa* attacks foolish love because of the ethical and political problem which it poses. For the good both of the knight's soul and the wider community, he should devote himself to controlling his passions, attaining prowess in the pursuit of arms, and avoiding selfish and immoral actions that will endanger others. By re-interpreting these tales from pagan mythology and extracting from old erotic 'matière' a new Christian 'sens', the *Othéa* points the reader in the direction of the soul rather than the body, whose frailties are the subject of the literal 'texte'.

PUTTING A GLOSS ON GENDER

In offering a radically different treatment of amorous matters from that provided by the *Rose*, the *Othéa* concentrates mainly on the figure of the knight as the desiring subject, rather than on the female object of his desires. Insofar as the *Othéa* does discuss the woman's role in love, it pointedly avoids presenting her as an accomplice, whether witting or not, in the knight's erroneous pursuit of foolish passion, as was the case in the *Rose*. In the 'querelle', Christine takes exception to Jean's use of the *Rose* as an erotic symbol by which to refer to a literal woman in an allegory which propounds the misogynist view that the female sex colludes in the loss of its own chastity.⁵⁹ In her later works in defence of women, such as the *Cité*, Christine offers an antidote to Jean's anti-feminist views on women by supplying abundant counter-examples of virtuous female characters from history. Here in the *Othéa*, however, she implicitly provides an alternative to Jean's mode of allegorisation: the allegories in her work lead in the opposite direction from that of the *Rose* since they employ literal women in the 'texte' as symbols of abstract concepts in the 'glose' and 'allegorie'.

⁵⁹ See Sarah Kay, 'The birth of Venus in the *Roman de la Rose*', *Exemplaria* 9 (1997), 7–37.

The *exempla* recounted in the *Othéa* follow instead the model provided by the *Ovide moralisé* in featuring both male and female characters who are interpreted *in bono* or *in malo* as bearers of moral truths. Yet even the *Ovide moralisé* itself pays occasional lip-service to misogynist tradition by inserting blanket diatribes against the female sex, which are not unworthy of Jean de Meung, into its allegorical explanations of stories involving women.⁶⁰ Moreover, when the presumably male author of the *Ovide moralisé* glosses *exempla* featuring men as negative, he does not then use *these* tales as a pretext for more generalised attacks on the male sex as a whole.

Mindful of this pervasive tendency on the part of her mythographical predecessors always to regard women as representatives of an entire sex, rather than as individuals, Christine takes every opportunity to prevent the reader from deriving from her *exempla* the view that any particular sin is specifically female. She therefore desexualises women, in the sense both of de-gendering and of de-eroticising them, in the successive layers of moral interpretation which are added to the literal level of the 'texte'. Thus, *pace* Schibanoff, Christine does not gender certain vices as female, thereby perpetuating the misogynist lessons typically found in 'patriarchal reading'. Nor, contrary to what critics such as Jane Chance have argued, does Christine seek here to valorise certain virtues as female or to celebrate sexual difference.⁶¹ Instead, in the *Othéa*, Christine employs a variety of strategies in order to help her reader interpret the stories featuring women in such a fashion as to avoid the kind of anti-feminist stereotypes familiar from the *Rose*.

These strategies involve glossing female characters in a number of different possible ways: first, as virtues to be encouraged; second, as vices to be avoided; third, as concrete or abstract objects to be shunned; and fourth, as the human soul itself. For each of these types of interpretation, Christine progressively shifts from literal to non-

⁶⁰ See, for example, the story of Calisto, the nymph cast out by Diana for losing her chastity, which is the pretext for an imprecation against women who attempt to kill their illegitimate offspring (*Ovide moralisé*, Book 2, lines 1706–819); the tale of Venus and Mars found in bed together, used to rail against duplicitous and unfaithful wives (Book 4, lines 1581–629); the account of Salmacis who pursued Hermaphroditus, aimed at attacking libidinous women (Book 4, lines 2250–81); and the story of Semele, who fatally insisted on being loved by Jupiter in the manner that he used with his wife Juno, taken to condemn strong-willed and forceful women (Book 4, lines 1060–85). However, the text also praises women for their steadfast piety, deemed to be generally greater than that of men (Book 3, lines 1273–91).

⁶¹ See *Letter of Othéa*, 121–33.

literal signification: from the 'texte' to the 'glose', with its euhemeristic and moral readings, and thence to the 'allegorie', with its spiritual readings. Furthermore, in performing these allegorisations, she persistently *removes* all grammatical indicators of feminine gender such that her specific female characters cease to signify actual women and are instead subsumed into a generalised but sex-indefinite set of people exemplifying that particular moral lesson. Thus, in the *Othéa*, in order to make her moral and spiritual lessons applicable to a male audience, and, more importantly, to discourage her male reader from making hasty, literal-minded judgments on the supposed failings of the female sex, Christine adheres to the linguistic convention whereby the masculine case is treated as unmarked and universal and the feminine case as marked and thus sex-specific. As Marina Yaguello puts it: 'Rares sont les mots féminins qui s'appliquent indifféramment aux hommes et aux femmes. On peut citer: *personne* et *victime*. Par contre, les mots masculins qui désignent également les femmes sont légion, en particulier dans le domaine des noms d'agents. *Tout sujet féminin peut prendre un attribut masculin. L'inverse n'est pas vrai.*'⁶² Many modern feminists might regret that in the *Othéa*, Christine fails to challenge what they would regard as a fundamental mechanism of patriarchal language.⁶³ However, the fact that Christine is here 'using the female to allegorize the human' is nonetheless an important innovation on her part,⁶⁴ since to her mind, the more pressing problem was how to ensure that her female characters were not read exclusively on the literal level of the 'texte'. By adding successive layers of interpretation and simultaneously avoiding the marked feminine case, Christine seeks to use stories of love featuring women for their moral and spiritual lessons rather than for their erotic content, without contributing further examples to the massed volumes of misogynist stereotype.

The first of Christine's strategies for de-sexualising female

⁶² Marina Yaguello, *Les Mots et les femmes* (Paris: Payot, 1987), 120, emphasis added.

⁶³ See, for example, Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 20, who states: 'Masculinity is the unmarked form: the assumption is that the world is male unless proven otherwise. Femininity is the marked form: it is the proof of otherwise.'

⁶⁴ See Richards, 'Sacred history', 29. Although Richards uses this expression to describe Christine's strategy of representing the *Cité* as a typological universal history of humanity and not just of women, it in fact corresponds just as accurately to Christine's mythographical re-workings in the *Othéa*.

characters involves glossing them as virtues.⁶⁵ In line with her critique of foolish love, she transforms the literal female object of desire presented in the 'texte' into an abstract virtue in the 'glose', one which can be pursued without fear of committing an impure action, thus substituting the ideal of charity for that of concupiscence. Critics such as Fleming have argued that this process of substitution is, in fact, already anticipated by Raison in the *Rose*, who proposes herself as an alternative love to that pursued by Amant by offering him the pleasures of friendship.⁶⁶ However, as we have seen in the 'querelle', Christine dismisses Raison as a genuinely rational, authoritative voice which provides an alternative to sexual love, because of the character's bawdy talk of 'coilles' which she deems likely to provoke lustful thoughts in the reader. In the *Othéa*, however, Christine is at pains to point out that the reader *can* safely give credence to the eponymous goddess since she is presented as a worthy alternative to foolish love whose prefatory remarks to Hector include an exhortation to take her as his desired object:

. . . Mais que de toy je soye amee.
 Amee, et pour quoy ne seroie?
 Je suis celle qui tous arroie
 Ceulx qui m'aiment et tiennent chiere. (154, lines 20–3)

As the 'glose' and the 'allegorie' make clear, if Hector is to aspire to 'proece' he must cultivate the abstract virtue of prudence, which is infinitely valuable and beatific (155–8).

However, not all chapters involving women who signify virtues are as direct or obvious as this. Indeed, in the example of Echo (chapter 86) it is only in the 'allegorie' that Christine makes clear that, contrary to what it might appear, this is not a tale of female lust:

Gardes qu'Echo tu n'escondises,
 Ne ses piteus plains ne desprises;
 Se son vueil tu peus soustenir,
 Tu ne scez qu'il t'est a venir. (270, lines 17–20)⁶⁷

Here, the young knight is encouraged not to ignore the signs of

⁶⁵ On the arbitrary link between grammatical gender and personifications of the virtues, see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Picador, 1985), 63–70.

⁶⁶ See John V. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover* (Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁶⁷ In Jean de Meung's text, Raison compares her pleas to Amant to give up his pursuit of the Rose with those of Echo who pleaded with Narcissus to reciprocate her love for him (*Rose*, lines 5804–8). Through this comparison, the extravagance of Echo's behaviour would therefore seem to undermine any reading of Raison as the voice of authority in the *Rose*.

Echo's love, her 'piteus plains' which reveal her desire, even though elsewhere in the *Othéa* such cries and laments are dismissed as symptoms of foolish love (chapter 22 on Pygmalion, for example). Although this advice in the 'texte' might therefore seem contradictory in the light of Christine's thorough-going proscription of foolish love, it in fact hints at an enigma which the reader must solve, an enigma which anticipates Echo's allegorisation as a force for good later in the chapter. The knight is enjoined to pay heed to Echo, despite not knowing what the consequences might be of accepting her advances, as the 'glose' begins to provide some clues about the nature of Echo's desire. Whilst Christine initially identifies Echo's pangs of love as those of all 'fins amans, qui d'amours sont reffusé' (271, lines 8–9), she goes on to give a euhemeristic reading of the story in which Echo is generalised as a 'personne qui par grant neccessité requiert autrui' (ibid., lines 13–14), which removes her from the context of the literal pursuit of love. The moral reading of the 'glose' reiterates this distinction, counselling the knight to take pity on any 'souffreteux qui le requierent' (ibid., line 18), without specifying those persons' gender. This mention of pity culminates in the 'allegorie', where the enigma of the 'texte' is revealed: the knight should not be too quick to dismiss the needy, as Echo herself represents the 'misericorde' which, out of a sense of charity, the knight should be ready to dispense to others: 'et est chose juste que qui veult estre aydié du souverain plus poissant, que ainsi il ayde le mendre en ce en quoy il est plus poissant de lui' (272, lines 2–4). As a result, Christine is able to remove the potentially negative connotation of a lustful female, by recasting her as non-erotic, sex-indefinite, and thus as deserving of the knight's merciful attentions.

The second of the strategies which Christine employs to allegorise her female characters involves glossing women as vices to which the knight should not subscribe. However, the *Othéa* is able to avoid using these female *exempla in malo* to support the anti-feminist view that certain vices are specifically feminine by alluding to the stock Christian practice of blaming the sin not the sinner. In Christine's earlier verse text, the *Dieu d'Amours*, Cupid attacks men and male writers such as Jean de Meung who are wont to make misogynist capital out of examples of sinful women:

Car le pecheur on ne doit diffamer,
Ce nous dit Dieux, n'en publique blamer.
Les vices bien peut on et les pechez

Tres fort blamer, sans ceulx qui entechez
 En sont nommer, ne diffamer nullui;
 Le tesmongne l'escript ou je le lui.

(*Dieu d'Amours*, lines 209–14)

In the *Othéa*, it is mainly pagan goddesses who are glossed as vices, as in the example of Venus (chapter 7). This goddess undergoes a series of significant changes in the course of the 'glose' and the 'allegorie'. She is first euhemerised as a real woman who took many different lovers, then interpreted as an abstraction, 'le vice de luxure [qui] estaint toutes vertus' (170, lines 5–6), a sin which can be generally abhorred without specifically implicating women. In the 'allegorie', Venus is ultimately glossed as vanity, which, in the words of Cassiodorus, is described as "la mere de tous maulx" (ibid., line 12). Although the term 'mere' is an obvious and motivated marker of feminine gender, it can nonetheless be safely used at this level of abstraction since it qualifies 'vanité', a vice whose grammatical gender is, on the contrary, purely arbitrary.⁶⁸

However, the clearest example of Christine's emphasis on castigating the sin and not the sinner so as to avoid gendering particular vices as feminine occurs in the story of Aglaros (chapter 18). Envious of her sister's happiness in having married the god Mercury, Aglaros is turned into stone by Mercury for barring his entry into their house. The 'texte' indicates from the very beginning that Aglaros is merely the *victim* of the goddess of envy:

Sur toute rien toute ta vie,
 Fuis la faulse deesse envie,
 Qui fist devenir plus vert que yerre
 Aglaros qui mua en pierre.

(184, lines 12–15 emphasis added)

The 'glose' then offers a euhemeristic account which extends the application of the story beyond just Aglaros to genderless 'aucunes personnes' (185, line 4). The moral level insists equally on this wider application of the story, and extracts from it the lesson that 'trop est villeine tache et contre gentillece estre envieux' (ibid., lines 7–8). The 'autorité' of the 'glose' shifts the emphasis back from the sinner to the sin, stating that "Cellui qui porte le faissel d'envie a peine perpetuelle" (ibid., lines 9–10), and using the demonstrative pronoun to

⁶⁸ On the tradition of representing as female all such abstractions, whether positive or negative, see Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey, Icon Editions (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 98–130.

indicate its lack of gender-specificity. Finally, the ‘allegorie’, taken from St Augustine, returns to the vice itself and describes its operations which spread outward from the afflicted person, rather than the actions of that person: “Envie est la hayne de felicité d’autrui, et se estant l’envie de l’envieux contre ceulx qui sont plus grans de soy . . . pareulx a soy . . . et . . . mendres de soy”’ (ibid., lines 14–18).

The *Othéa* similarly glosses as vices those female characters who constitute a negative object for the knight. In the case of Bryseyda (or Criseyde) (chapter 84), whose deeds are particularly hard to defend, Christine first has to resort, in the ‘glose’, to direct repudiation of her abhorrent behaviour, in the hope of preventing her from being read to support a general anti-feminist attack on all women. Such an attack had, of course, been delivered by both Boccaccio and Chaucer, for which the latter is supposedly made to repent in writing the *Legend of Good Women*.⁶⁹ In the *Othéa*, in the ‘glose’ of chapter 84, Christine retains the figure of Criseyde as a literal woman, precisely in order to point up her difference from others and leave untarnished the reputation of the female sex as a whole. Criseyde is described as the type of woman best simply avoided: the young knight is told not to ‘acointier *semblable* dame’ (268, line 21, emphasis added), if he wishes to love in a worthy and blameless fashion. However, in the ‘autorité’, the reader’s attention is then shifted from this undeniably bad example of female behaviour to the more general and sex-neutral plural noun ‘des mauvais’ (ibid., line 22) from whose company the knight should abstain for fear of adopting their habits. Criseyde, thus de-sexualised, can be interpreted in the ‘allegorie’ as the vice ‘vaine gloire’ (ibid., line 25), against which the knight’s soul should be on perpetual guard.

The third of Christine’s strategies for avoiding misogynist stereotype in the *Othéa* is to allegorise women as concrete or abstract

⁶⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Filostrato*, ed. Vittore Branca, in *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittorio Branca, vol. 2, I Classici Mondadori (Verona: Mondadori, 1964). Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* and Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, G: 264–6, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), third edition. Whether Chaucer’s claim to be making amends for his depiction of Criseyde was a response to a real outcry from his female readers or merely a pretext to justify his devoting another text to the subject of women, he had in fact tried to pre-empt the charge of attacking the female sex in the earlier work: see *Troilus and Criseyde*, V: 1772–8. However, like Jean de Meung’s similar apology to women, Chaucer’s desire to deflect any criticism of himself from his readers may also be tantamount to a “disavowal of responsibility” trope, such as that found in the *Rose*: see Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984; Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988, second edition), 198.

objects. This process, which involves a progressive shift from woman to object which the reader must shun, is illustrated in the story of the Gorgon Medusa (chapter 55). The 'texte' begins with an explicit injunction to the knight not to give in to the temptation afforded the eyes: 'Gard bien que tu ne la regardes' (228, line 26). This reference to sight and its dangerous effects is explicated in the 'glose', which points out that Medusa was 'une damoiselle de souveraine beauté' (229, lines 4–5) who was found guilty of lying with the god Phebus in the temple of Diana and thus of desecrating it, for which she was turned into a serpent. The euhemeristic interpretation offered of the story gives both a more literal reading than that of the 'texte' (which depicts Medusa as a serpent), since it discusses her as a woman, 'moult belle et de mauvais affaire' (ibid., lines 21–2), as well as a non-literal reading of her as a 'cité ou ville qui jadis souloit estre de grant bonté' (ibid., line 14). Christine veers here among multiple euhemeristic interpretations designed to sharpen the reader's powers of analysis. However, it is clear that, of these two readings of Medusa as a woman or as a city, it is the non-literal one which anticipates the moral level of the chapter, thereby shifting the reader's attention away from the literal woman and towards an abstraction, in this case an indefinite 'chose mauvaise' (229, line 24 – 230, line 1). The 'autorité' returns to a human dimension but generalises the lesson of the chapter, encouraging the knight to shun 'gens plains d'iniquité' (230, lines 1–2), a sex-indefinite term. Ultimately the 'allegorie' becomes completely abstract, for the soul is meant not to 'penser a delices quelconques' (ibid., line 5) but instead to cast its mind and its gaze inwards onto itself, 'soy mirer en l'escu de l'estat de perfeccion' (ibid., line 6).

The fourth and final strategy by which Christine confounds the misogynist slanders of texts like the *Rose* consists of allegorising certain female characters in the *Othéa* as the human soul itself which, like the virtues and the vices, has no sex.⁷⁰ The 'allegorie' of certain chapters in which the female character is presented as a signifier of the soul uses grammatical constructions which bear no trace of specifically feminine gender and provide spiritual lessons applicable to either men or women. The example of Medea (chapter 58), rather than being used to castigate women for their irrational and excessive

⁷⁰ See Eleanor Cammo McLaughlin, 'Equality of souls, inequality of sexes: woman in medieval theology', in Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 213–66.

behaviour in love, illustrates the lesson that 'le bon esperit ne doit laisser seignourir sa propre voullenté' (234, line 2).⁷¹

Even a female character guilty of the most scandalous behaviour can be re-interpreted in terms of the soul, as in the example of Pasiphæe (chapter 45). This 'femme fole' presents such a disturbing picture of perverse female sexuality, in her love for a bull which eventually engenders the Minotaur, that Christine is obliged, in the 'glose', to provide both a euhemeristic reading and a direct repudiation similar to that given for Criseyde. The euhemeristic interpretation suggests that this bull was in fact a man 'de vile condicion' (216, line 4), whereas the Minotaur himself had a 'forme d'omme et nature de thorel' (ibid., line 6), thereby making Pasiphæe's sexual proclivities less shocking. Christine then stresses that although this particular woman was guilty of extraordinary lustfulness, the same should not be thought of all women: 'Et pour ce que *ceste* dame fu de tele condicion, veult dire au bon chevalier que il ne doit dire ne soustenir que *toutes* femmes soient semblables' (ibid., lines 9–11, emphasis added). Instead of an 'autorité', Christine simply provides the reader with an immediate 'antidote' to Pasiphæe, in the shape of the learned Cleopatra who taught Galen the rudiments of medicine, as proof that not all women are pre-disposed towards evil. Thus rendered individual and specific, Pasiphæe can no longer be read as an example of all women. Indeed, the undeniably extreme nature of her fault allows Christine, in the 'allegorie' to interpret Pasiphæe as 'l'ame retournee a Dieu' (ibid., line 16), who incarnates the spiritual truth that no fault is so great that it cannot be forgiven.

A final example of a woman allegorised as the human soul is that of Corinis, who was killed by her lover Phebus on the indictment of the crow who claimed that she had been unfaithful to him (chapter 48). The 'allegorie' of this chapter offers a long and elaborate discussion of the soul in which Corinis is described in terms of St Augustine's images of the soul as a 'coffre qui est plain de tresor', a 'chastel qui est assegié des ennemis' and a 'roy qui se repose en sa chambre de retrait' (221, lines 1–3). The 'allegorie' expounds on this image of the castle chamber whose openings are glossed as the five senses of the body and through which the soul will either be lost or

⁷¹ La Vieille cites Medea as an example of a woman betrayed by her lover, but whose reaction to the betrayal is extraordinarily violent and out of proportion, since she kills her own children in anger at Jason's desertion (*Rose*, lines 13227–32).

saved.⁷² The soul is at such risk that all commerce with the outside world should be conducted with extreme circumspection, since, as Christine makes clear in her critique of love, the five senses, and sight in particular, are the main factor by which the foolish lover is lost: 'Aussi, quant l'ame doit yssir a veoir, oyr et parler et sentir, elle doit avoir paour pour huissier, qui doit avoir pour masse la consideracion des peines d'enfer et du jugement de Dieu' (221, lines 11–13). So, far from passing judgment on the truth or falsehood of the crow's claims about Corinis, Christine uses the female protagonist here as a figure of one of the key teachings in her work.

In Christine's interpretations of the 'textes' of the *Othéa*, female characters cease to signify literal women and come instead to represent virtues, vices, objects and even the human soul. For each chapter of the *Othéa* where a woman is featured, the linguistically marked female terms in the 'texte' are progressively replaced by sex-neutral, unmarked terms in the 'glose' and 'allegorie'. In so doing, Christine exhorts the reader to move from the perilous domain of love in the 'texte' which is marked by sexual difference, to the safe domain of charity towards all human beings in the 'glose' and 'allegorie', with the aim of helping the reader to attain salvation and freedom from the constraints of the body and of gender.

CONCLUSION

In its treatment of love and women within the generic framework of a courtesy book, the *Othéa* undoubtedly constitutes one of Christine's earliest attacks on misogynist opinion. As part of her defence of women, this work should be set squarely within the context of Christine's views on allegory as a didactic tool rather than that of a celebration of women's achievements as literal, historical figures, which she was to provide in the *Cité*. In the *Othéa*, her use of stories from classical mythology, including the story of the destruction of Troy, is subordinated to the end of providing her young knightly reader with a *summa* of virtuous instruction. One of the most important aspects of this instruction concerns the knight's conduct in love, a key indicator of his personal ethics and one with an important bearing on the well-being both of his own soul and of the wider body

⁷² See Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition*, Acta Regiae Societatis Humaniorum Litterarum Lundensis (Lund: LiberLäromedel, 1975), 63–8.

politic. This instruction in amorous matters is intended to prevent the knight from blaming women if he himself should fail to observe the strictures of chastity.

In using classical mythology as a source of material from which to derive moral lessons, the *Othéa* effectively offers a critique of works such as the *Rose* which abuse this type of material for the purposes of anti-feminist polemic. As an implicit refutation of this authoritative text which, to Christine's mind, fails to point the reader in the direction of virtue and instead counsels the pursuit of vice, the *Othéa* not only instructs the reader in morals but also demonstrates the very process by which such morals must be deduced when the reader is confronted with the perilous pleasures of the literal, pagan fable. Through the use of puzzles, commonplaces and *exempla*, the reader is enjoined to search beyond the narrative level of the 'texte'. In so doing, he is encouraged to read stories of love in order to discern the temptations of the senses, the dangers of idleness, and the perils of abandoning the pursuit of arms for that of love. More generally, he should become aware of the fact that both male and female characters alike can be interpreted as bearers of Christian truths, whether *in bono* or *in malo*, and that anti-feminist lessons should not be read off from the literal level of the work. It is therefore crucial that he understand which virtues to follow, which vices to shun, which objects to avoid, and, ultimately, how to protect his soul. In this way, he avoids both the literal-minded slanders propounded by misogynists and the immoral behaviour towards women which, for Christine, writers such as Jean de Meung would seem to propound. The *Othéa* is indeed an 'anti-*Rose*', one whose critique of anti-feminism is clearly embedded within a programme of ethical instruction. Christine's teachings in this work are thus designed to help the male reader choose between the transient pleasures of the sensual letter, on the one hand, and the infinitely more valuable rewards of the underlying spiritual meaning, on the other. If, in this text, Christine uses female characters from pagan tales to offer her reader lessons in morals, in the *Avision*, which is the subject of the next chapter, we shall see that she herself becomes the bearer of a moral message in an allegory whose aim is to serve a more explicitly political purpose.

CHAPTER 3

The 'Avision-Christine': a female exemplar for the princely reader

Of all Christine's works in defence of women, her allegorical dream-vision, the *Avision*, is by far the most cryptic and difficult.¹ Indeed, she herself seems to have been aware that her readers would have problems in understanding it: 'Les uns sur le language donront leur sentence en plusieurs manieres: diront que il n'est pas bien elegant, les autres que la composicion des materes est estrange' (144, lines 28–31). Many modern scholars have tried to make sense of the text by examining how, in the autobiographical section of Book III, Christine legitimates her role as a woman writer in the male world of clerkly discourse.² Yet reading the *Avision* simply as Christine's celebration of her writerly achievements is to ignore other key aspects of the work, which also deals extensively with pressing political matters. In this chapter, I shall argue that analysing the *Avision* within the generic context of the 'mirror for princes', rather than just that of autobiography, allows us to understand the text as a unified whole in which Christine puts her self-representation as a woman at the service of her political goals.³ Thus, as we shall see, the *Avision* is a 'mirror' with an important difference: here, the model

¹ All page and line references in the body of this chapter are to the *Avision*; I have added punctuation, capital letters and accents to avoid ambiguity and modernised certain spellings, such as 'j' for 'i'. For a translation of the *Avision* into modern English see *Christine's Vision*, trans. Glenda K. McLeod, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, series B, 68 (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1993), hereafter referred to as *Vision*.

² See, for example, Sylvia J. Huot, 'Seduction and sublimation: Christine de Pizan, Jean de Meun, and Dante', *Romance Notes* 25,3 (1985), 361–73; Mary L. Skemp, 'Autobiography as authority in *Lavision-Christine*', *Le Moyen Français* 35–36 (1994–95), 19–31; Kevin Brownlee, 'Widowhood, sexuality, and gender in Christine de Pizan', *Romanic Review* 86,2 (1995), 339–53.

³ For an earlier version of this argument, see Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'L'*Avision-Christine*: autobiographical narrative or mirror for the prince?', in Brabant, *Politics*, 95–112.

for teaching the implied princely reader how to act in the best interests of his country is Christine herself.

Composed in 1405, the *Avision* seems to have had a very restricted circulation and now survives in only three manuscripts.⁴ The text lacks any formal dedication but it was probably written for the Burgundian court of Jean sans Peur rather than for the Valois court of Charles VI and his brother Louis d'Orléans, to whom most of Christine's previous lyric works had been dedicated.⁵ The *Avision* is in three parts, in each of which Christine encounters a particular personified abstraction: Dame Libera in Book I, Dame Opinion in Book II, and Dame Philosophie in Book III. The form of each of these three parts is different: the first is an allegorised history of France; the second is in large part a commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*;⁶ and the third is a personal *consolatio* in the Boethian tradition.⁷

It is perhaps because the *Avision* contains such apparently disparate subject matter that most critics who have analysed it from a gender perspective have tended to examine Christine's autobiographical self-representation in isolation from the political issues which she raises elsewhere in the work.⁸ For example, Sylvia Huot has argued that in Book III, Christine's images of giving birth to her writings are a metaphorical response to Jean de Meung's images of penetration as a symbol for poetic creation, which help her to

⁴ These manuscripts are Paris, BN f. fr. 1176; Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 10309; and ex-Phillipps 128.

⁵ See Willard, *Life*, 155–72.

⁶ See Suzanne Solente, 'Christine de Pisan', in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 40 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1974), 389; Liliane Dulac and Christine M. Reno, 'L'humanisme vers 1400, essai d'exploration à partir d'un cas marginal: Christine de Pizan, traductrice de Thomas d'Aquin', in Monique Ornato and Nicole Pons, eds., *Pratiques de la culture écrite en France au XVe siècle*, Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Etudes Médiévales, Textes et Etudes du Moyen Age, 2 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1995), 161–78; and Dulac and Reno, 'Traduction et adaptation dans *L'Advision-Christine* de Christine de Pizan', in Charles Brucker, ed., *Traduction et adaptation en France à la fin du Moyen Age et à la Renaissance. Actes du Colloque organisé par l'Université de Nancy II, 23–25 mars 1995* (Paris: Champion, 1997), 121–31. See also Bernard Ribémont, 'Christine de Pizan et l'encyclopédisme médiéval', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 174–85.

⁷ See Benjamin Semple, 'The Consolation of a woman writer: Christine de Pizan's use of Boethius in *L'Avision-Christine*', in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, eds., *Women, the Book and the Worldly, Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 39–48. See also Glynnis M. Cropp, 'Boèce et Christine de Pizan', *Le Moyen Age* 87 (1981), 387–417.

⁸ For a study which discusses precisely this problem of the disparate nature of the text, see Liliane Dulac, 'Thèmes et variations du *Chemin de long estude* à l'*Advision-Christine*: remarques sur un itinéraire', in Ribémont, *Sur le chemin*, 77–86.

reclaim for women, and thus for herself, the authority to write.⁹ Similarly, for Kevin Brownlee, Christine's aim in the *Avision* is to legitimate her position as a serious woman author by depicting herself in gendered but de-sexualised terms as a virtuous widow.¹⁰ Finally, Benjamin Semple has examined how Christine re-works Boethius, her main source, in order to express her difficulties as a woman in coming to Philosophie and receiving the foods of her teaching.¹¹

Such critical studies as these, although insightful and perceptive in their treatment of gender, do not take account of the fact that the *Avision* diverges from Christine's other works in defence of women in addressing the rapidly deteriorating political situation of its time, a situation of imminent civil war between the royal dukes Jean sans Peur and Louis d'Orléans.¹² Indeed, it was written in a year during which Christine had already implored Queen Isabeau de Bavière to mediate between these two antagonists in her *Epistre à la Reine*.¹³ It is only Christine Reno and Joël Blanchard who have attempted to relate Christine's self-representation as a female author in the *Avision* to the text's broader political content. For Reno, Christine uses autobiography in the *Avision* in order to justify her entry as a female author into the realm of political commentary,¹⁴ whilst for Blanchard, Christine's account of her life is motivated by an urge to understand the processes of history in which she is caught up.¹⁵

Yet even these political readings of the *Avision* do not go far enough. In order to see just how Christine constructs her self-representation to fit her overall rhetorical and political strategy in the *Avision*, we need to place this work within its generic context as a

⁹ Huot, 'Seduction'. ¹⁰ Brownlee, 'Widowhood'.

¹¹ Semple, 'The Consolation'.

¹² Willard, *Life*, 155–8. On the political climate of 1405, see Jean Favier, *La Guerre de Cent Ans* (Paris: Marabout, 1980), 413–19, and R. C. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI 1392–1420* (New York: AMS Press, 1986); on the relationship between literature and politics in this period, see Margarete Zimmermann, 'La littérature française à la fin du Moyen Age: une littérature de crise?', in Sergio Cicada and Anna Slerca, eds., *Recherches sur la littérature du XVe siècle: Actes du VIe Colloque International sur le Moyen Français*, Milan, 4–6 mai 1988, vol. 3 (Milan: Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1991), 207–19.

¹³ For an edition of this work, see Angus J. Kennedy, 'Christine de Pizan's *Epistre à la Reine*', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 253–64.

¹⁴ See Christine M. Reno, 'Self and Society in *L'Avision-Christine* of Christine de Pizan' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1972).

¹⁵ Joël Blanchard, 'Artéfact littéraire et problématisation morale au XVe siècle', *Le Moyen Français* 17 (1985), 7–47, and 'Christine de Pizan: les raisons de l'histoire', *Le Moyen Age* 42,3/4 (1986), 417–36.

'mirror for princes'. The *Avision* should be seen as example of this genre because it is a fundamentally *didactic* text: Christine does not simply diagnose her country's political ills but also calls for France's rulers to provide a remedy for those ills. She thus presents herself as the 'antygrafe', or scribe (77, line 16),¹⁶ of Libera, the allegorised figure of France, whose role is to inform the French princes, Libera's children, that they must come to their mother's aid in order to prevent further political disaster (108, lines 3–6). As in all of Christine's other 'mirrors for princes', such as the *Fais et bonnes meurs*, the *Policie*, and the *Paix*,¹⁷ her aim in the *Avision* is to remind her implied princely reader of the urgent need for him to base his political conduct on ethical behaviour. Indeed, she argues that it is on the moral and spiritual plane that a ruler must, above all, prove himself, particularly in times of political crisis.

Where the *Avision* differs from Christine's other texts in this genre is that here she gives her princely reader a lesson in ethics by proposing her intellectual itinerary as a model for his own self-examination. Christine's use of autobiography in this way to inculcate more universal truths is in line with other medieval autobiographical texts, such as St Augustine's *Confessions* or Pierre Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*.¹⁸ By subordinating her own personal narrative in the *Avision* to a programme of didactic instruction aimed

¹⁶ See Christine Moneera Laennec, 'Christine "antygraphe": authorial ambivalence in the works of Christine de Pizan', in Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds., *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women* (State University of New York Press, 1993), 35–49, who relates the term 'antygrafe' to 'antiphrasis' found in the *Cité*, 624. This view is not tenable, however, since the two words are not coterminous. 'Antygrafe' refers to a practice of writing whilst 'antiphrasis' refers to a rhetorical and polemical practice of reading which consists of deliberately interpreting the text for the opposite of what it actually appears to say; thus, in the *Cité*, Christine chooses, at times, to read misogynists' criticisms of women as praise rather than condemnation. In the *Avision*, by contrast, Christine is more concerned with encoding a political message which does clearly seek to apportion blame and responsibility to those whom she feels have deserted France's best interests. On Christine's use of 'antiphrasis' in the *Cité* see Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold'; and for other discussions of the meaning of 'antygrafe', *Vision*, 46, n. 16; Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Fondements et fondations de l'écriture chez Christine de Pizan: scènes de lectures et scènes d'incarnation', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 79–96.

¹⁷ See Charity Cannon Willard, 'Christine de Pizan: from poet to political commentator', in Brabant, *Politics*, 17–32; and Kate Langdon Forhan, 'Reflecting heroes: Christine de Pizan and the mirror tradition', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 189–96.

¹⁸ See Evelyn Birge Vitz, 'Type et individu dans "l'autobiographie" médiévale', *Poétique* 6 (1975), 426–45; and Paul Zumthor, 'Autobiographie au Moyen Age?' in his *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 165–80.

at addressing the moral and spiritual dimensions of the prince's existence, Christine puts her autobiography squarely at the service of her political aims.¹⁹

However, Christine, unlike Abelard or Augustine, was neither a clerk nor a theologian. How then could she persuade her princely reader to accept her as an exemplar whose femaleness would in no way detract from the universal significance of her personal account? Before this question of gender in the *Avision* can be properly addressed, we need to establish what Christine's political purpose was in this 'mirror for princes'. This chapter will therefore argue, first, that in her authorial preface to the *Avision*, Christine provides her reader with a coherent interpretive methodology for reading the text as a 'mirror' whose key political lesson is that the fates of individuals and the state are intimately bound up with each other. Secondly, it will show that Books I and II of the *Avision* develop the themes set out in the preface and offer a diagnosis of the political perils which have beset France as a result of poor rulership and of social irresponsibility throughout the body politic. Finally, it will demonstrate just how, in Book III, Christine encourages the princely reader to look beyond her female gender for the ethical solution her autobiographical narrative proposes to his own political dilemma.

ALLEGORY, ETHICS AND POLITICS

An important piece of evidence for why we should read the *Avision* as a 'mirror for princes', an authorial preface written by Christine herself, has only recently come to light.²⁰ It was found in what appears to be the latest of the three manuscripts of the text, ex-Phillipps 128, which should thus be regarded as the most reliable and authoritative version of the work since, as James Laidlaw, Gilbert Ouy and Christine Reno have argued, Christine's constant

¹⁹ An example of a Middle English text which also puts autobiography at the service of a 'mirror for princes' is Thomas Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*. For an edition of this text see F. J. Furnivall, ed., *Hoccleve's Works: III. The Regement of Princes and Fourteen of Hoccleve's Minor Poems*, Early English Text Society, es 72 (London: Kegan Paul, 1897); and for a study of the text which analyses how 'Hoccleve [attempts] to put micro-history – his own life history – and macro-history – *exempla* for the prince – on the same plane', see Anna Torti, *The Glass of Form: Mirroring Structures from Chaucer to Skelton* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 87–106, 89.

²⁰ See Christine M. Reno, 'The Preface to the *Avision-Christine* in ex-Phillipps 128', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 207–27, hereafter referred to as 'Preface'. For an English translation of this part of the text, see *Vision*, 3–9.

desire to revise her texts means that the earliest manuscripts of a work do not always represent her final word on the subject.²¹

This preface, written in the author's own hand, indicates, like the extensive glosses provided in the *Othéa*, that Christine saw her princely readers as needing help in interpreting allegorical texts such as the *Avision* if they were to derive maximum benefit from their hidden meanings. It emphasises three major principles of Christine's poetic theory and practice, for each of which she was drawing on Boccaccio's mythographical handbook, the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*: first, that the 'veiled language' of allegory reveals hidden truths; secondly, that the possibilities for interpreting a text are open-ended; and thirdly, that the beauty of a text therefore comes from this 'multiplicity' of possible meanings.²² Christine here might seem to be contradicting her own earlier theoretical precepts, as set out in the 'querelle', that authors should make their meanings clear and so limit their readers' freedom to interpret texts as they please. In fact, this is not the case. In the *Avision*, as in the *Othéa*, interpretive open-endedness and multiplicity no more mean the unlimited play of signification for Christine than it did for Boccaccio in his defence of the study of pagan poetry, or for that matter, for St Augustine in his theory of scriptural exegesis, to which both Boccaccio and Christine were heavily indebted. On the contrary, one of the reasons Christine, like her two predecessors, uses the obscure veil of allegory in the *Avision* and the *Othéa* is because she regards the intellectual rigours involved in deciphering allegorical texts as morally improving. As Boccaccio states:

Surely no one can believe that poets invidiously veil the truth with fiction, either to deprive the reader of the hidden sense, or to appear the more clever; *but rather to make truths which would otherwise cheapen by exposure the object of strong intellectual effort and various interpretation, that in ultimate discovery they shall be more precious.* . . . [Augustine] says of Psalm 126: 'For perhaps the words are rather obscurely expressed for this reason, that they may go away the richer, because they have found that closed which might be opened in many ways, than if they could open and discover it by one interpretation.'²³

²¹ See Gilbert Ouy and Christine M. Reno, 'Identification des autographes de Christine de Pizan', *Scriptorium* 34,2 (1980), 221–38; James C. Laidlaw, 'Christine de Pizan – an author's progress', *Modern Language Review* 78 (1983), 532–50; and Laidlaw, 'Christine de Pizan – a publisher's progress', *Modern Language Review* 82 (1987), 35–75.

²² 'Preface', 220–4.

²³ *Boccaccio on Poetry*, 60, emphasis added.

Besides, as in the *Othéa*, the fact that Christine proposes that the reader can interpret the *Avision* in a multiplicity of ways does not therefore mean that an *infinite* number of interpretations is possible. For Christine, it is only those readings which improve the reader's moral understanding that are valid. In this respect, she would also seem to be following St Augustine, who declares: 'Sometimes not just one meaning but two or more meanings are perceived in the same words of scripture. Even if the writer's meaning is obscure, there is no danger here, provided that it can be shown from other passages of the holy scriptures that each of these interpretations is consistent with the truth.'²⁴ Thus, in accordance with Christine's views expressed in the 'querelle', both the *Othéa* and the *Avision* provide their readers with a hermeneutical methodology which, whilst allowing for a plurality of interpretations, points the reader resolutely away from the literal level of the text and towards its moral and spiritual dimensions of meaning.

In the preface to the *Avision*, Christine outlines for her reader the type of interpretations which he should undertake of her work. As a model for him, she sets out the three interpretive levels according to which the first thirteen chapters of Book I of the *Avision* and, in particular, the opening image of Chaos and Nature²⁵ could be read: 'la fiction de cestui livre se puet alegorisier triplement, c'est assavoir assimiller au monde general, qui est la terre, aussi a homme singulier et puis au royaume de France'.²⁶ As Reno points out, the first two of these levels, the world (in the sense of Creation) and the individual, are familiar from traditional literary and biblical exegesis, whilst the third level of the state is more commonly found in other late medieval dream-visions, such as Philippe de Mézières's *Songe du vieil pelerin* (1389).²⁷ Christine, like many of her contemporaries, used the

²⁴ *De Doctrina Christiana*, 169.

²⁵ This allegory of Chaos and Nature thus acts as a 'threshold image' placed at the beginning of the text to alert the reader to the different possible ways in which it can be read: see Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (Hanover/London: University Press of New England, 1972); Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1979).

²⁶ 'Preface', 212.

²⁷ *Ibid.* See also Sandra L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre Othéa': Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), 32, who states: 'In the work of both Christine and Philippe de Mézières we find statements, echoing Macrobius in his Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, to the effect that dream literature permitted three levels of allegorical interpretation. A dream could be interpreted as it applies to each man, to the world in general, and to the kingdom of France.' However, in

'veiled language' of allegory to engage in coded political commentary. Philippe, for example, had employed allegory to conduct a scathing attack on the debased Christian values of the countries of the world, to deplore the corrupt state of government in France, and to furnish the young king, Charles VI, with a 'mirror for princes'.²⁸ Similarly, Jean Gerson used political allegory in his sermon 'Vivat Rex', delivered to the royal court on 7 November 1405, in which, like Christine, he appeals for a moral reform of government in the context of extraordinary political upheaval.²⁹ He too couches his remarks in allegorical form, blaming specific vices for the present state of France's decline and disruption, rather than singling out particular individuals for attack. Although Gerson, as Chancellor of the University of Paris, commanded great moral and intellectual authority, he was nonetheless at pains in his sermon to authorise his political criticisms, albeit indirectly expressed, by claiming to be inspired by the personification of 'discrecion', rather than by 'dissimulacion' or by 'crueuse sedicion'.³⁰ An example of a writer's failure to avoid the dangers which could be incurred by speaking plainly is that of the preacher Jacques Legrand, whose thinly veiled allegories made the targets of his attacks, which included Isabeau de Bavière and Louis d'Orléans, all too clear.³¹ The account of Legrand's sermon preached on Ascension Day, 1405, given in the Chronicle of the Religieux de St Denis, reveals the very real risks which the preacher was running by his flagrant criticisms of such powerful public figures:

'Preface', 226, n. 13, Reno questions how fully Philippe actually carries through this 'trilevel allegorical reading' in the *Vieil pelerin*.

²⁸ See Dora M. Bell, *Etude sur le Songe du Vieil Pelerin de Philippe de Mézières (1327–1405)* (Geneva: Droz, 1955); Jeannine Quillet, 'Songes et songeries dans l'art de la politique au XIV^e siècle', *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 3 (1975), 327–49; Christiane Marchello-Nizia, 'Entre l'histoire et la poétique: le "songe politique"', *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 55 (1981), 39–53; Joël Blanchard, 'Politique des points de vue et stratégies discursives: Philippe de Mézières et le discours de la réformation morale', in Dieter Kremer, ed., *Actes du XVIII^e Congrès International de Linguistique et de Philologie Romanes (Université de Trèves (Trier), 1986)*, VI (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1988), 491–500.

²⁹ See 'Preface', 221. For an edition of the 'Vivat Rex', see *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7,2, no. 398, 1137–85.

³⁰ 'Vivat Rex', 1152–5.

³¹ See Evencio Beltran, 'Christine de Pizan, Jacques Legrand et le *Communiloquium* de Jean de Galles', *Romania* 104 (1983), 208–28, 226, who comments: 'Ce sont précisément nos trois auteurs [Gerson, Legrand et Christine] qui, au nom du bien commun et de la moralité publique, vont réagir avec le plus de fermeté contre la tournure inquiétante que prenaient les événements politiques en 1405.'

cuidam pertranseunti familiari regine et impacienter dicenti: 'Qui michi crederet, submergeretur miser ille,' minas ejus despiciens, iterum libere inquit: 'Et revera ad sceleste perficiendum facinus non nisi unum tibi similem tyrannum opportheret.' Ultra multa alia ignominiosa verba que pertulit pro veritate dicenda.

(One of the queen's courtiers, who was standing near him at the time, burst out saying, 'In my opinion, this wretch should be drowned.' Unintimidated by these threats, the cleric boldly retorted: 'Yes, and no doubt you're just the villain to commit such a heinous crime.' For having the courage to speak the truth, he had to endure many more verbal attacks such as these.)³²

Given the charged circumstances of the times and the possibility of a hostile reaction to overt criticism of highly placed court figures, it is not surprising that Christine should employ the 'veiled language' of allegory to express her political views in the *Avision*. Her message to the prince in this text is not, however, contained exclusively in the allegorical level which pertains to the state, nor is it limited solely to Book I. In fact, it is precisely the relationship *between* the levels of the individual, the state and the world which is central to the political meaning of the work as a whole, as in another important late medieval 'mirror for princes', the *Confessio Amantis* of John Gower, Christine's Middle English contemporary. Like the *Avision*, Gower's text uses allegory to teach its princely reader to understand the relationship between diverse topics such as the individual's ethical conduct in love, the necessity of good kingship for the smooth running of the state, and the harmonious balance of the planetary spheres.³³ The theory on which Christine and Gower were both drawing for this expository methodology is the commonplace medieval concept of the microcosm and the macrocosm which they probably derived from the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum*.³⁴ According to this work, man is a 'lesser world' or microcosm of the physical universe and should, like the universe, be 'an ordered

³² *Religieux*, vol. 3, ch. VII, 270, my translation.

³³ See Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's ethical microcosm and political macrocosm', in Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 135–62.

³⁴ See Percy G. C. Campbell, *L'Épître d'Othéa: étude sur les sources de Christine de Pisan* (Paris: Champion, 1924), 173–4. See also Jacques Monfrin, 'La place du *Secret des secrets* dans la littérature française médiévale', in W. F. Ryan and Charles B. Schmitt, eds., *Pseudo-Aristotle, The Secret of Secrets: Sources and Influences*, Warburg Institute Surveys, IX (London: Warburg Institute, 1982), 73–113.

hierarchy in which each part is harmoniously related to the whole',³⁵ a concept which Gerson also espouses in his sermon, stating that 'le petit monde, c'est . . . l'omme'.³⁶ The preface to the *Avision* thus glosses Christine's figure of the giant Chaos as a representation both of the *macrocosm* of the world and of the *microcosm* of the individual: 'ce dit ymage puet estre pris pour une chascune creature humaine a par soi, selon le parler des philosophes qui nommerent homme ymage de petit monde'.³⁷ Extending this concept into the domain of politics, Christine uses the idea of the 'body politic', familiar since John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*,³⁸ to demonstrate how the Chaos figure can also be taken to represent the state of France as another microcosm which should also reflect the harmonious order of the heavenly realm: 'par le corps de cest ymage se puet prendre le royaume de France, le quel est grant et n'est que ung corps'.³⁹ As Book I of the *Avision* goes on to show, the individual and the state are themselves also linked in a relationship of microcosm and macrocosm, since Christine emphasises that disharmony within the individual has had disastrous repercussions at the level of the state. In this respect she would seem to be indebted to Giles of Rome's influential 'mirror for princes', *De Regimine Principum*,⁴⁰ which propounded the view that individual virtue lies at the heart of the healthy state and that 'good governance of others depends on ethical self-rule',⁴¹ a lesson which, as we have seen, Christine had already outlined in the *Othéa*. This view that personal ethics were central to political government was also shared by Gerson, who argues that the three different levels of the king's existence, as an individual, a political being and a moral being ('corporelle', 'civile', and 'espirituelle' respectively), are all organically connected.⁴² Like Christine,

³⁵ Porter, 'Gower's ethical microcosm', 136.

³⁶ 'Vivat Rex', 1139.

³⁷ 'Preface', 208, emphasis added.

³⁸ See Kate Langdon Forhan, 'Polycracy, obligation and revolt: the body politic in John of Salisbury and Christine de Pizan', in Brabant, *Politics*, 33–52.

³⁹ 'Preface', 208. See also Forhan, 'Reflecting heroes', 190.

⁴⁰ As well as in the *Othéa* and the *Avision*, Christine had made extensive use of the *De Regimine Principum* for her study of kingship in the *Fais et bonnes meurs*: see Willard, *Life*, 116, 119. Philippe de Mézières recommends study of this text as well as Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* to his princely reader, Charles VI: see *Viell pelerin*, vol. 2, 222.

⁴¹ Porter, 'Gower's ethical microcosm', 135. See also Willard *Life*, 119, who comments that in the *Fais et bonnes meurs*, 'the first part of [Christine's] text on kingship is devoted to a discussion of how the man should rule himself according to high moral standards' (emphasis added).

⁴² 'Vivat Rex', 1139.

Gerson too believed that the task of improving the political health of the state must logically begin with that of improving the moral health of its individual rulers.

In order to help the reader to make connections between these different levels of meaning, Christine expands her discussion of the allegory of Chaos and Nature into a more detailed application of the theoretical concepts of the macrocosm and the microcosm.⁴³ Having established that Chaos can be read as a figure of Creation, positioned between the heavens, earth and the abyss, of the individual who must live in the world but aspire to heaven and avoid hell, and of France whose head dwells in the Catholic faith and whose feet straddle scriptures and science, Christine glosses the crown on Chaos's forehead as the stars of Creation, the virtues of the human soul, and the princes and nobles of the realm. Secondly, she points out that the two orifices through which Chaos is fed by Nature can be seen as corresponding to the ideas of birth and death, the individual's body and soul, and France's temporal and spiritual powers. Thirdly, Christine argues that the four substances, 'fiel, miel, plomb et plume' (74, line 20), which are placed into Chaos's oven-like mouth to nourish him, signify not only the four elements which make up all Creation but also the bitterness, earthly delight, heaviness and lightness which sustain the individual, as well as the conscience, hope of divine mercy, fear of hell and transience of life upon which the kingdom of France is founded. Christine's suggested interpretations of this image stress the narrative of salvation which underpins all three levels of her text: humanity's place in Creation, individually and politically, is dependent on its desire to escape the infernal abyss through upholding the Christian faith.

By invoking the concepts of the macrocosm and the microcosm, Christine reveals how the individual, the state and the world are all interrelated, an idea which is the key to reading the *Avision* as a whole. Her authorial preface therefore provides a model of how we should read the *Avision* as a 'mirror for princes' in its emphasis on personal salvation as the basis of good government. Although this text may lack the systematic format of instruction and the practical advice on government contained in, for example, Christine's *Policie*, it is no less concerned with 'l'introduction des princes en vie

⁴³ The following discussion is all contained in 'Preface', 208–10.

vertueuse' than any of her other works in this genre.⁴⁴ Certainly, Jacques Krynen's remark in his discussion of Christine's other 'mirrors', that she steadfastly believed in 'une régénération sociale par l'amélioration de l'individu',⁴⁵ is equally applicable to the *Avision* where Christine's self-appointed task is 'to use her writings as a platform to speak to those in power – her patrons – to exhort them to the practice of virtue in the resolution of their disputes and in the conduct of political affairs'.⁴⁶ Before we can understand how Christine relates her didactic aims in this text to the issues of autobiography and gender, we must first examine what, for her, were the political problems which faced France's rulers at this time and what kind of response her 'mirror for princes' could propose to them.

PUBLIC VIRTUE AND PRIVATE LIVES

Critics who have discussed the overall structure of the *Avision* have often suggested that, whilst Book I deals with political questions, Book II moves on to a higher metaphysical plane.⁴⁷ Yet, as we shall see, there is a striking continuity of theme between these two sections as regards the political analysis which they both offer. Whilst Libera, in Book I, explains to Christine how the country's present ills have arisen, Opinion, in Book II, reveals that the cohesion of the state is imperilled when its rulers and the body politic as a whole are lacking in social responsibility. The interconnections between the actions of individuals and the well-being of the state, which are outlined in the preface to the *Avision*, are fully explored in these two parts of the text.

⁴⁴ See Joël Blanchard, 'Christine de Pizan: tradition, expérience et traduction', *Romania* 111 (1990), 200–35, 213, who provides a concise and instructive definition of the 'mirror' genre: 'Leur finalité est "l'introduction des princes en vie vertueuse". Leur contenu s'est renouvelé avec la redécouverte de l'*Éthique* d'Aristote devenue la base de la théologie morale scolastique. L'apprentissage des vertus donne au roi la souveraine maîtrise de lui-même, et cette discipline lui permet d'assurer l'équilibre du corps social. Dans la voie ouverte par Thomas d'Aquin, Guillaume d'Occam et surtout Gilles de Rome, les auteurs de ces traités mettent en place un modèle rationnel de comportement, expression d'un double rapport, celui du roi à lui-même et celui du roi à ses sujets.'

⁴⁵ Jacques Krynen, *Idéal du prince et pouvoir royal en France à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Picard, 1981), 75. See also Margarete Zimmermann, 'Vox femina, vox politica: the *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*', in Brabant, *Politics*, 113–27.

⁴⁶ 'Preface', 221.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Maureen Slattery Durley, 'The Crowned Dame, Dame Opinion, and Dame Philosophy: the female characteristics of three ideals in Christine de Pizan's *L'Avision Christine*', in Bornstein, *Ideals*, 29–45.

To play the king: lessons in leadership

Libera's pessimistic diagnosis of France's ills is based on a contrast between the good kingship exhibited by rulers in the past and the poor kingship demonstrated by rulers in the present. Libera explains to Christine that the French monarchs whose reigns proved to be the most beneficial for the state were those who, as individuals, combined the attributes of faith and wisdom,⁴⁸ an explanation which is anticipated in the preface where the Chaos image is glossed as the kingdom of France, built on both scriptures and sciences.⁴⁹ Libera states that such wise and virtuous French rulers did indeed live up to their status as leaders of the faith with the special title of 'tres crestien'.⁵⁰ These beneficent kings include Clovis,⁵¹ Charlemagne, St Louis⁵² and, especially, Charles V (79–84).⁵³ The model of kingship to which all these individuals conformed is presented in terms of a number of allegorical images, all of which were commonplaces of late medieval political theory and several of which are indicated in the Chaos figure and glossed in the preface. First, 'mirrors for princes' often described good kings as light-givers to their subjects, as when Philippe de Mézières explains to Charles VI: 'Tu doys estre doncques non tant seulement lumiere mais trescliere lumiere, voyre a ton peuple, qui jusques cy est ale en tenebres par

⁴⁸ For the importance Christine attaches to wisdom in the king, see *Paix*, 67–8. See also Claire Richter Sherman, 'Representations of Charles V of France (1338–1380) as a wise ruler', *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns 2 (1971), 83–96; Liliane Dulac, 'Unité et variations de la sagesse dans le *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 307–16. On the importance of wisdom as a key aspect of kingship, see Eugene F. Rice, Jr, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958); and Paul Archambault, 'Comynnes' "saigesse" and the Renaissance Idea of Wisdom', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 29 (1967), 613–32.

⁴⁹ See 'Preface', 208. On Gerson's similar emphasis on the importance of faith in the king, see 'Vivat Rex', 1182: 'Puis que foy crestienne est le fondement de la vie espirituelle, elle doit apparoir singulierement au roy tres crestien, tant de parole comme de fait et en tous ses subgiez.'

⁵⁰ See Krynen, *Idéal du prince*, 203–22; and *Viell pelerin*, vol. 2, 249: 'Et te doit souvenir, Beau Filz, en tremblant, que pour le sacre, tressaint et seculier entre tous les roys crestiens, avec les saintes oeuvres de tes predecesseurs, pour lequel sacre tu es appelle le roy trescrestien . . . une petite deffault en toy, par negligence ou par malice perpetree, devant Dieu sera plus grande repute que quatre foiz plusgrant d'aucune de tes subgiez.'

⁵¹ See *Vision*, 48, n. 27, where McLeod notes that 'Although Towner, p.18 identifies this figure as King Meroveus, Christine's preface and gloss indicates he is King Clovis.' See also Danielle Buschinger, Liliane Dulac and Christine Reno, 'Note sur Clovis chez Christine de Pizan', *Speculum Medii Aevi* 2,4 (1996), 9–13.

⁵² *Avision*, 22; *Vision*, 50, n. 37.

⁵³ On the status of Charles V as 'tres crestien' see *Fais et bonnes meurs*, vol. 1, 94–8.

deffaulte de lumiere.⁵⁴ In the *Avision*, this idea is suggested by the crown of stars on Chaos's forehead and is exemplified by Clovis, the first Christian king of France, who is described as the one who 'par vertu de sage conseil, attray lumiere tellement que les tenebres de celle mortel secheresse furent chaciés' (79, lines 20–1), and by Charles V, whose illuminating presence still casts a faint glimmer on Libera's face even after his death (84). Significantly too, Libera represents her hoped-for future deliverer as a light-giver, a 'soleil fort' (96, line 18), who, she prophesies, will act like Samson to destroy her enemies.⁵⁵ Secondly, Libera introduces the common-place image of the king as the gardener of the state, an idea familiar from another late-medieval political dream-vision, the *Songe du vergier*.⁵⁶ Libera praises Charles V for having sought to quash dissent in the realm and striven for unity, an endeavour expressed by the metaphor of clearing out weeds; 'estirper de tous lez inutiles herbes, chardons, orties et toute male racine derompre' (83, lines 4–5). She similarly represents rulers who provide good government as gardeners who diligently water and nourish their country. Clovis is therefore described as having replenished the whole realm by his virtuous actions: 'et tant pourchaça par sages maistres que l'abondance du fleuve vivant rendy ruissiaux, sources et fontaines en si grant quantité que toutes mes plantes en furent arrousees et vivifiees' (79, lines 24–6). Finally, Libera explains that the good king has a divine power to heal, both literally and metaphorically, an idea to which Philippe had also subscribed in the *Vieil pelerin*: 'mon Pere par sa sainte grace t'a ordonné, non tant seulement maistre de la nef francoise, mais phisicien souverain et solennel de toutes les personnes generaument des quatre gerarchies des troys estaz du royaume de Gaule'.⁵⁷ Libera lauds Charlemagne as the son of Pèpin

⁵⁴ *Vieil pelerin*, vol. 2, 131.

⁵⁵ Whilst Willard, *Life*, 158, suggests that this reference applies to Jean sans Peur, in whose Burgundian library one of the three copies of the *Avision* was inventoried, McLeod, *Vision*, 55, n. 67, argues that since the rays of the sun were a heraldic emblem of both Charles V and VI, the 'soleil fort' may be a coded reference to the young dauphin, Louis de Guyenne. McLeod's suggestion seems the more plausible of the two given that Christine's later 'mirrors for princes', the *Policie* and the *Paix*, were both written for the dauphin. Moreover, as Hindman, *Painting and Politics*, 108–10, points out, whereas the Valois kings made frequent use of the emblem of sun's rays, the heraldic badge of Jean sans Peur was a carpenter's plane. See also Colette Beaune, 'Costume et pouvoir en France à la fin du Moyen Age: les devises royales vers 1400', *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 55 (1981), 125–46.

⁵⁶ See Quillet, 'Songes', 339. For an edition of this text see Marion Schnerb-Lièvre, ed., *Le Songe du Vergier*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions CNRS, 1982).

⁵⁷ *Vieil pelerin*, vol. 2, 132. See also Marc Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges* (Paris: Armand Colin,

of whom it can be said that 'le fruit qui en yssoit . . . moult valoit contre perpetuel venim' (80, lines 27–30), whereas she explicitly refers to Charles V as a 'phisicien' (82, line 22).

In contrast to these good rulers of the past, whose personal qualities maintained the state in good health, Libera turns to the present and explains that the well-being of the state is now at risk because France's rulers are in moral disarray. This view that a ruler who is not in control of himself cannot presume to rule others wisely is a fundamental tenet of 'mirrors for princes'. As Christine herself states in the *Policie*: 'Doncques est il necessaire pour bien gouverner le corps de la policie publique que le chief soit sain, c'est assavoir vertueux. Car s'il est malade, tout s'en sentiroit.'⁵⁸ Libera laments that whereas in the past, especially during the 'golden age'⁵⁹ of the reign of Charles V, she was nourished by the king and kept in a state of good health, her current condition is marked by decay, drought and disease: 'Ceste orreur courant au jour d'ui parmi mes gaignages rent flettris et sechés les verdurees et liqueurs de mes fruis, tarist mes fontaines, amendrist mon renom, et lourdement me tourmente. Et qui plus m'est grief, c'est la paour de pis, et que mes plaies par faulte de remede soient converties comme infistulees et incurables' (87, lines 25–30).⁶⁰ However, she is careful not to lay the blame for this on the present king, Charles VI, who was a victim of intermittent bouts of madness and whom Libera represents as a 'faucon pelerin' (84, line 23) which has been struck down by Fortune whilst in its prime.⁶¹ In the *Fais et bonnes meurs*, Christine had been equally concerned to depict Charles VI as a martyr figure, one who is punished not for his own sins but for those of his people: 'Dieu du tresor de sa libéralité veult recompenser à cestui roy, pour le soubstrait de sa santé et le flayel et glaive sur lui descendu, non mie par ses pechiez, mais de ceulz du peuple punis en sa personne.'⁶² Instead, in the *Avision*, Libera conducts a veiled attack on those whom she *does* deem responsible for her lack of well-being. Whilst

1961); Krynen, *Idéal du prince*, 222. For references to this idea in Christine's other 'mirrors for princes', see *Paix*, 62; and *Policie*, 44.

⁵⁸ *Policie*, 5. ⁵⁹ See *Paix*, 70–1.

⁶⁰ See Jean-Louis G. Picherit, 'Les références pathologiques et thérapeutiques dans l'œuvre de Christine de Pizan', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 233–44.

⁶¹ See *Avision*, intro., 27; Hindman, *Painting and Politics*, 45; and *Vision*, 51, n. 45, for Christine's possible debt to the *Vieil pelerin* for the image of Charles VI as a young falcon, in which he is constantly referred to as 'le Blanc Faucon au bec et piez dorez'.

⁶² *Fais et bonnes meurs*, vol. 1, 167.

claiming to refrain from blaming any individuals personally, she nonetheless implicates France's present rulers for their shortcomings – particularly the royal dukes, their counsellors and the nobles – by devising an allegory of the vices of Lust, Avarice and Fraud which have undermined good government and to which, implicitly, those in power have succumbed. These vices are almost identical to those criticised by Gerson in the 'Vivat Rex'.⁶³ Hence, for both Christine and Gerson in their respective allegories, it is personal morality which underpins the political role of those holding the reins of power.

These three vices, which Libera identifies as having laid low the virtues of Chivalry, Truth and Justice respectively, constitute a perversion of different aspects of the allegory of Chaos and Nature which Christine had glossed in the preface.⁶⁴ Lust and Avarice both represent an abuse of nourishment, since they gorge themselves on earthly pleasures to the neglect of the finer foods of salvation as set out in the preface. Libera cites a scriptural prophecy (Zechariah 5:7–11), which represents Lust as a woman feeding on lead, in order to recall that the pleasures of the flesh lead only to damnation (94). Whilst this attack on lust may be a general condemnation of the loose behaviour of knights which, to Christine's mind, had led to the decline of French chivalry,⁶⁵ it is also possible that she is here making an oblique criticism of Louis d'Orléans, who was rumoured to be having an affair with his sister-in-law, Isabeau de Bavière.⁶⁶ This interpretation is made all the more plausible by the fact that Libera later quotes several examples of kings and knights such as Amnon, Paris, Childeric and Tarquin who, fired by lust, contrived to sleep with women forbidden them by ties of kinship or of loyalty (102–3). Libera similarly inveighs against Avarice, whom she describes as a

⁶³ See 'Vivat Rex', 1155 and *passim*, for Gerson's attack on Fraud, Laziness, Lust and Injustice.

⁶⁴ See also *Paix*, 77–83; and *Policie*, 18–21, 93–5.

⁶⁵ See *Vision*, 54, n. 58.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, xxvii. On this royal scandal see Favier, *La Guerre de Cent Ans*, 415–16, and the report of Jacques Legrand's sermon to the Court contained in the *Religieux*, vol. 3, ch. VII, 268, where he too makes a coded reference to Queen Isabeau's behaviour: 'Venus soliam occupans, ipsi eciam obsequuntur ebrietas et commessacio, que noctes vertunt in diem, continuantes choreas dissolutas. Hee maledicte et infernales pedissece, curiam assidue ambientes, mores viresque enervant plurium' (The goddess Venus is all-powerful at your court: drunkenness and debauchery are her servants who are turning night into day with their dissolute festivities. These damned followers of the devil are always going about in your court, debasing the morals and the strength of many). (My translation.)

'fornaise insaciable et inextinguible' (97, lines 26–7) for causing honey to be turned into bitter gall. By this allegory she means that the bearers of high office, in seeking only personal gain, have exploited their positions to the detriment of the public good. As McLeod has suggested, Christine may here be covertly criticising the greed of those members of the royal family left jockeying for power after Charles V's death.⁶⁷

Fraud, by contrast, is described by Libera as a perversion of the idea of light, since she acts to stop the light of Truth's mirror from shining out, at which Christine the protagonist exclaims: 'ha! quel pitié de tel beaulté tenir couverte, comment fust elle seant es places des assemblees publiques affin que chascun se peust louer de sa lumiere' (88, lines 23–5). This image of the mirror returns us directly to the question of personal ethics which is central to the *Avision* since, as Libera suggests, in deceiving others, those who should govern themselves virtuously in order to govern the country wisely have lost the ability to see themselves and their deeds in the light of Truth and their own salvation. As Libera declares, 'Comment si fol est homme qu'il n'avise sa fin?' (95, lines 11–12).⁶⁸

Just as Libera reveals to Christine how the moral shortcomings of high-placed individuals can have a disastrous effect on the state, so she argues that such individuals risk putting their own eternal souls in peril. Citing a whole series of biblical prophecies such as those relating to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:10–17) and Belshazzar (Daniel 5:18–28), Libera shows, on the one hand, that kingdoms have been destroyed by God because of the vices displayed by their rulers, a fate which is also likely to befall France if its rulers do not mend their ways: 'Ne savons nous que Dieux est immuable, comme dit ay, *et que tel est ores comme lors estoit?* Ne sont les Escriptions toutes pleines des verités de ses punicions?' (101, lines 27–9, emphasis added).⁶⁹ On the

⁶⁷ See *Vision*, 51, n. 44, where McLeod states that this attack may also be directed against 'those surrounding both papal courts'.

⁶⁸ For Philippe's image of the prince as a mirror by which other estates must measure themselves, see *Veil pelerin*, vol. 2, 249: 'Quant le chief est malade, tous les membres s'en deulent; et quant le miroir est souillé, les regardans ou miroir ne cognoistront ja leurs souilleures.'

⁶⁹ See Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, 'Le poète et le prophète: littérature et politique au XVe siècle', *Le Moyen Français* 13 (1983), 37–57; Mühlethaler, 'Les deux tentations du poète: le prophète et le philosophe', in *Colloque 'Images de l'écrivain au XIVe et XVe siècle'* (Orléans: n.p., 1985), 1–29; and Andrea Tarnowski, 'Le geste prophétique chez Christine de Pizan', in Claude Thomasset and Michel Zink, eds., *Apogée et déclin: Actes du Colloque de l'URA 411, Provins, 1991* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993), 225–36.

other hand, these prophecies also serve to remind France's rulers of their own individual fate, but on the spiritual rather than the political plane. The most significant of these prophetic lessons is taken from Luke 1:52: 'deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles' (93, lines 9–10) (He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, but the humble have been lifted high, *Vision*, 55, n. 64). This prophecy concerns the process of inversion according to which the divine scheme of things is the opposite of that which pertains on earth, since the mighty and the lowly in this life will change places in the next. For Libera, this spiritual shortsightedness on the part of France's rulers is the key to their present moral deficiency: 'Et a quoy s'eslieve homme, qui est terre et cendre? . . . Et que vault avoir seigneurie au monde, grans tresors, terres, possessions, et poissences sur les autres un pou de temps, pour en si user que on s'en enqueure dampnacion perpetuelle?' (106, lines 11–16). As we shall see, this prophetic lesson emerges as the leitmotiv of the whole of the *Avision* since, in Book III, Philosophie presents Christine as a model of lowliness by which to teach those, like the implied princely reader, to recognise that their pursuit of power and high status on earth is in fact placing their future salvation in jeopardy.

On earth as it is in heaven: lessons in social cohesion

In Book II of the *Avision*, Opinion expands on Libera's discussion of France's political crisis and places it within a wider perspective. Her analysis is organised according to the three levels of the world, the state and the individual as set out in Christine's preface, since she provides teachings in the three domains of metaphysics, politics and morality. In stressing the links between these domains, Opinion shows how disunity and conflict are an inevitable part of the human condition when individuals are not enlightened by faith and true self-knowledge.

Although the scholastic setting of Christine's encounter with Opinion is meant to represent the University of Paris, this allegorical figure exerts her power over all areas of human endeavour, not just abstract thought, so that no section of the body politic is immune from her influence. Describing Opinion's multi-faceted appearance, which takes the form of thousands of coloured shadows, Christine enumerates the different spheres of action in which this allegorical figure plays an important role: 'les autres formes d'ombre, comme de

gens, de bestes ou d'autres choses, s'estendoient plus dehors les escoles et voloient par tout le monde; car celles plus apartenoient a oeuvres manuelles et fais que a speculation et plus estoient attribuees aux gens d'armes et ordre de chevalerie et autres ars mecaniques et ouvrables' (111, lines 18–23). Opinion herself declares that she is all-pervasive since she was created at the same time as humankind in order to stimulate its desire for knowledge (112). However, like humankind, Opinion too is fallible and mortal because, unlike angelic intelligence which perceives truth directly, human intelligence has to function through the faulty vessel of the body: 'Et pour ce convient que moy [Opinion], qui composee suis de la nature de l'ame en tant que je suis speculative, et de la nature du corps en tant que je suis ignorant, soie et habite ou cuer de creature humaine' (115, lines 2–5).⁷⁰ Being the daughter of Ignorance, Opinion can therefore be a force either for good or for bad. She is positive in the sense that she urges humans to seek out the truth or to acquire a skill, but negative in the sense that she is only provisional and uncertain, and so can cause humans to make errors of judgment (114, lines 13–14). Although Opinion can lead to wisdom, she is nonetheless still inferior to a direct, unmediated vision of Truth in its highest form, a vision which Christine only receives from Philosophie.⁷¹

As Opinion reveals to Christine, the main consequence of her actions is the dissemination of conflict and fragmentation where there should be unity and cohesion.⁷² It is this lesson which underpins Opinion's teachings in each of the three areas of human endeavour that she goes on to discuss. Firstly, as concerns the macrocosm of Creation, she explains how she misled not just pagan theologians and heretics who strove to identify the first causes of the universe in metaphysical terms, but also the philosophers of Antiquity who sought to account for causality in the universe in material terms. In all these cases, their interpretations were false because they posited multiplicity rather than unity as the principle governing the macrocosm of the universe. Opinion states that she was responsible

⁷⁰ See *Vision*, 92, n. 15; Semple, 'The Consolation'. See also Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St Augustine to Ockham* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), 221–2.

⁷¹ See *Vision*, xxix. See also David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (New York: Random, 1962), 43.

⁷² See *Vision*, xxx–i, for Christine's debt to Boethius on this point: 'Boethius noted that when one observes the world from the mortal perspective, one perceives diversity instead of unity, truths instead of Truth. This multiplicity disappears, however, when the universe is seen from eternity.'

for all the different religions which have attempted to analyse Creation from a metaphysical perspective – all except for Christianity, which is both unitary and God-given. In her account of these various religions, Opinion emphasises that the greater the number of gods worshipped, the greater the error which she has been able to induce in the worshippers. For example, though natural law was not Christian, because it arose out of humankind's moral faculties which were still intact after the Fall, it was nonetheless monotheistic and therefore 'premiere et bonne estoit a qui bien la tenoit' (115, line 18), whereas only 'hommes de *fol* entendement' (ibid., line 20, emphasis added) believed in pagan religions which were devoted to several gods. Similarly, Opinion accepts responsibility for having created and propagated heresies, which are also marked by their perverse diversity. Thus, heresies such as Manichaeism, which interpreted the world as a conflict between good and evil,⁷³ are deemed false because they believed numerous divine forces to be at work in the universe rather than just the single agency of God (116).

Concerning different interpretations of the material world, Opinion reveals how she deceived the ancient philosophers in exactly the same way as she misled the theologians. She describes how, having helped to establish the logic behind the theory of material first causes by which the origins of Creation can be understood, she then went on to provoke dissension amongst the various philosophers as to the actual identity of these causes. Her actions led to fragmentation in this field of enquiry as each philosopher attributed ultimate causality either to a different one of the four elements, or to a plurality of elements (117–18). As Opinion finally demonstrates, all such speculations were to prove fruitless because they were limited only to what was perceivable by the senses.⁷⁴ In her view, only Aristotle came near the truth, since instead of declaring material causes to be the origin of Creation, he deemed the final cause of the physical world to be non-corporeal, single perfection; in other words, the 'unmoved mover' (130), a conclusion which is, of course, compatible with Christian doctrine.⁷⁵ Of the previous philosophers mentioned by Opinion, she states that only Pythagoras and his theory that the first principle of Creation lies in

⁷³ See *Vision*, 92, n. 20.

⁷⁴ Ibid., xxxiii.

⁷⁵ Ibid. See also Leff, *Medieval Thought*, 14; and John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150–1350)* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), 60–1.

numbers came close to arriving at this revealed truth, since it too posited unity in the form of the number one.⁷⁶

Opinion's teachings on the macrocosm of Creation, which may appear to be somewhat out of place in a 'mirror for princes', are in fact directly relevant to her teachings on the microcosms of the state and the individual which she goes on to deliver to Christine and, by implication, to the princely reader. As we have seen, the significance of the theory of the macrocosm and the microcosm for 'mirrors for princes' is that the laws at work in the sublunary sphere should ideally correspond to those at work in the divine sphere. Since there is harmony and unity in the heavens, so there should be social cohesion at the level of the state and moral integrity at the level of the individual. Gerson makes this same point in the 'Vivat Rex', where he too cites Aristotle as the authority in these matters: 'royaulme ou regne est police et gouvernement meilleur et plus durable, convenable et raisonnable, qui soit a l'exemple du monde qui n'est gouverné que par ung dieu souverain. Le monde, dit Aristote, XII *Metaphysice*, ne se veult point mal gouverner, et pluralité de princez ou principaulz est mauvaise: unus ergo princeps.'⁷⁷ The important difference, however, between the divine and the sublunary spheres is that of causality because, as Opinion points out, whilst God is the prime mover in the heavens and on earth, *she* is the immediate mover in influencing human thought (132). Thus, whilst she has no power over God, whose realm is unitary and immutable, Opinion *does* produce important effects on the state and the individual, both of which are diverse and mutable in the extreme. Yet Opinion also uses this argument to force Christine to correct the view which, as author, she had expressed in her previous writings, that it is the capricious goddess Fortune who is responsible for the 'mutacions' which affect the contingent, human world:⁷⁸ 'Et doncques . . . je conclus vraye ma proposicion que je precelle les choses ouvrees et que Fortune a qui tant de poissance attribues n'est fors ma chamberiere mercenaire comme conduisseriesse des oeuvres ja par moy disposees a mettre a effett' (ibid., lines 7–13). Instead, by stressing the primacy of Opinion over Fortune, because she works as an *internal* force within human beings rather than as an *external* agent

⁷⁶ *Vision*, xxxiii; Knowles, *Medieval Thought*, 41–2.

⁷⁷ 'Vivat Rex', 1139.

⁷⁸ See Nadia Margolis, 'The Poetics of History: An Analysis of Christine de Pisan's *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1977), 20–86.

acting upon them, the *Avision* operates a shift in emphasis which is of primary significance to both Christine and the princely reader. By effectively throwing out the 'alibi' of the influence of Fortune, the *Avision* underlines the importance of self-knowledge and free will which are needed to combat the ill effects of Opinion. This emphasis on human causality is central both to this and other 'mirrors for princes', such as that of Gower, who similarly rejected Fortune as the source of influence in human affairs.⁷⁹ In using the allegorical figure of Opinion to explain why the microcosms of the state and of the individual suffer from disharmony because of human partiality and misjudgment, Christine puts responsibility firmly on to all members of the body politic, and especially the ruler, to rise above their own self-interest. As Philosophie will reveal to Christine in Book III of the *Avision*, harmony can only be achieved, whether in the state or in the individual, once human free will is directed towards a higher end than simply personal gain.

In her second set of teachings, which concern the political microcosm of the state, Opinion reveals how she has been responsible for the conflicts that she has fomented both between different realms and within the same realm, which is why she should not be trusted. She demonstrates that since she breeds only conflict, human history has been marked by a succession of conquests followed by defeats, as in the examples of Babylon and Troy which have undergone a cycle of rise and fall (133–5). Whilst inspiring bravery in some leaders, such as Cyrus who conquered Babylon, she also induced folly in other rulers, such as Laomedon who brought destruction upon his own city of Troy.

Opinion then relates this political lesson to Christine's contemporaries as she shifts her discussion from these classical examples to that of France. Her pessimistic analysis of present-day France, which is racked by disunity and dissension, echoes the diagnosis of the country's political ills offered by Libera in Book I of the *Avision*. Yet rather than holding specific vices responsible for France's decline, as Libera had done, Opinion imputes this decline to her own contrary operations, which have inspired each of the princes competing for power to seek his own material self-interest at the expense of political unity: 'Regardez et avisez quelz descors je mez meismement entre les princes, qui sont d'un sang et amis naturelment, par les diversitéz

⁷⁹ See *Confessio Amantis*, Prologue, lines 529–47.

de moy qui suis contraire en eulx. . . . Car chascun dit qu'il a droit, et ainsi le veult soustenir' (136, lines 6–11). The repercussions of this disunity at the head of the state are felt throughout the rest of the body politic, thus undermining the very social fabric of France; from the ministers and counsellors who are carrying on the princes' squabbles amongst themselves to the commoners who are fighting each other in taverns over trifling matters (136–7). Moreover, she argues that where she creates disagreement amongst different members of a society as to what actually constitutes material happiness, that society will not be at peace with itself: 'Et pour ce que ainsi je differe, suis je cause des debas du monde, et chascun me cuide avoir en soy meilleur' (137, lines 16–18). The danger of such partiality of opinion is that worldly means such as wealth, physical love, learning or chivalry come to be taken as ends in themselves. Paradoxically, like the proverbial Cretan liar, Opinion seeks to convince Christine that she is telling the truth when she says that humankind should not put its faith in her: 'Ho, quel folie en homme, de qui le sens doit gouverner raison, se fonder sens elle sur moy et jugier par moy certainement de choses non certaines et qu'ilz ignorent' (ibid., lines 4–6). Therefore the key political lesson which emerges from Opinion's teaching on the state is that when human beings privilege their own material well-being above all else, the whole of the body politic then suffers.

In her third teaching, Opinion applies this political lesson to the moral behaviour of the individual, since, as the result of faulty human understanding, whilst the state suffers disharmony the individual himself suffers a corresponding loss of moral integrity. Opinion criticises clerks and knights who fail to act as moral members of the body politic because instead of promoting the common good, they undertake learning and chivalry solely for the material benefits that will accrue to them.⁸⁰ In her other 'mirrors for princes', such as the *Policie*, Christine describes how true clerks should eschew material gain and instead seek wisdom, quoting Valerius Maximus who praised the philosopher Democritus 'pour ce premierement qu'il desprisa richesses, lesqueles maintes foyes ont donné empeschement a acquerir philosophie'.⁸¹ In the *Avision*, clerkly misdeeds are illustrated by the example of the alchemists whose venal experiments Opinion derides. The alchemists' obsession

⁸⁰ *Vision*, xxxv.

⁸¹ *Policie*, 179.

with the material world is mirrored by their persistence in reading philosophical texts purely for the literal message which they contain rather than seeking knowledge of higher metaphysical truths. They waste their time in producing ever more contorted readings of the letter of a text in a futile attempt to obtain a secret which will always elude them. On the one hand, Opinion criticises the alchemists for having a harmful effect on the state, since such charlatans often gain an unhealthy hold over the minds of greedy rulers: 'de telz arque-mistes sourdent aucune fois de grans trompeurs qui cabusent les seigneurs et leur font a croire que s'ilz eussent quelque mise, n'est mie doute qu'ilz ont ja attained un grant secret si en tireroient un grant proffit' (138, lines 27–30). On the other, she condemns the abject moral state to which alchemists reduce themselves by living like beasts who wallow in filth, as in the case of the student who tried to use his own excrement to make gold, since he deciphered 'mercure', a common term in manuals of alchemy, to mean 'cure ton marc' by turning the word around so as to read it backwards (139, lines 23–4).⁸²

Opinion similarly reproaches the chivalric estate for attending to earthly, rather than spiritual concerns, since so many of them take up arms for the wrong ends. As she goes on to explain, the proper role of a knight is to fight for the good of the body politic rather than for his own personal gain: 'pour deffendre l'eglise, son prince, son pays, sa terre, le bien publique, le droit des ignocens' (140, lines 15–16). Where clerks seek wealth, knights acting under the influence of Opinion seek equally erroneous goals: vain glory rather than true honour, revenge rather than true justice (140–2), again acting against the kind of precepts which Christine addressed to knights in her other 'mirrors for princes' such as the *Policie* where she outlines how knights should love arms, be brave, show solidarity with each other, be loyal, pursue honour and act with prudence against their enemies.⁸³ Opinion points out that those knights who are reneging on their allotted public duties are also failing to pursue their own salvation, as in the example of those who undertake trial by combat: 'car vers Dieu mesprennent et pechent grandement' (141, lines 9–10).

In sum, Christine's encounter with Opinion teaches her that the

⁸² On alchemy in the *Avison*, see Christine Moneera Laennec, 'Prophétie, interprétation et écriture dans l'*Avison-Christine*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 131–8.

⁸³ *Policie*, 112–13.

human race is prone to disunity and conflict in all its endeavours where individuals lack true knowledge of their condition. In the course of her two dialogues with Libera and Opinion, the political message of the *Avision* which emerges is that those at the head of the body politic in France must look into themselves, not outside, for an answer to the misfortunes afflicting the state. In Book III, as we shall now see, Christine uses her autobiographical account both to reinforce this message and to persuade the princely reader to accept her as a model for his own edification.

(SELF)-PORTRAIT OF A LADY: REFLECTIONS OF A HUMAN SOUL

Just as Christine herself indicates in the preface to the *Avision* that her narrative journey should not be read simply in the literal sense,⁸⁴ so her long autobiographical complaint in Book III is not intended to be read primarily as 'a record of her evolution both as a writer and as a person', as Charity Cannon Willard has suggested.⁸⁵ It is doubly ironic that so many critics *have* chosen to interpret this section exclusively in terms of personal self-revelation when Philosophie so explicitly warns against this type of literal reading in arguing that Christine herself has erred in taking the events of her life at face value, rather than seeking to understand their spiritual significance. As Evelyn Birge Vitz has argued, unlike modern autobiography in which writers seek to reveal their *individuality*, in medieval autobiographies such as Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* writers present themselves in all their *typicality* as human beings who must struggle to come as close to God as possible.⁸⁶ Although Christine's narrative differs completely from Abelard's story of his castration and subsequent moral rehabilitation, the same motivation drives both writers: to propose themselves as examples for their readers, in terms of how they come to understand their earthly misfortunes and God's reasons for allowing suffering into their lives.

How then does Christine's complaint, which is an intimate self-portrait of a bereft and grieving woman, contribute to the political message of her 'mirror for princes'? How does the consolation which Philosophie offers to Christine in response to her complaint address the political problems of the state as well as her particular situation as an individual? By what means does Philosophie encourage the

⁸⁴ 'Preface', 212.

⁸⁵ Willard, *Life*, 160.

⁸⁶ Vitz, 'Type et individu'.

princely reader to look beyond the specificity of Christine's female gender for the universal significance of her particular case and to take her as an exemplar for his own spiritual self-examination?

A widow's complaint

In this final section of the *Avision*, Christine ceases to be merely a witness to the events which Libera and Opinion have unfolded before her and instead reveals herself to be fully involved in these events as a member of the ailing body politic of France. She therefore structures her autobiographical complaint in accordance with the theory which she had set out in her preface: that the microcosm of the individual mirrors the macrocosm of the state. Placing her own private misfortunes into a broader, political context,⁸⁷ Christine makes common cause with Libera by creating many parallels between the two of them in their status as disconsolate widows. First, Christine links her suffering as an individual to that of the state by identifying Fortune as the ultimate source of all their troubles, despite the fact that Opinion had already encouraged her to reject this capricious goddess in Book II. Inveighing against Fortune for striking down the wise and virtuous Charles V, which has created a loss as keenly felt by her and her family as by the state itself, Christine exclaims: 'ne fu ce pas par [Fortune] voirement . . . qu'a cestui royaume fu procuré le grief dommage du quel malement se senti le mesnage de Maistre Thomas' (152, lines 15–17). Whilst Fortune has left Libera metaphorically 'widowed' by the death of Charles V (95), the mutable goddess literally bereaves Christine by the deaths of both her father and her husband (153–4). Secondly, Christine strengthens her identification with Libera by symbolising their decline in fortunes as a contrast between the nourishment which they used to receive and that which they now have to stomach. Just as under good kings Libera was properly nurtured, but under bad kings she is starved and bled dry, so Christine describes how in the past she was 'nourrie en delices', but is now made to digest the more sober 'mes des veusves' (154, lines 24, 28). Thirdly, Christine uses identical terms to link her private misfortunes as a

⁸⁷ See also Blanchard, 'Artéfact littéraire', 16, who comments: 'C'est un champ plus universel, le corps de police avec les princes, les juges, les avocats, les marchands, le tout venant de la société civile, ce qui suppose de la part de l'individu une vie mêlée au monde social et une ouverture aux valeurs de pitié et de foi.'

widowed woman to the public misfortunes of the 'widowed' state. Where Libera explains that she is the victim of the fraud, avarice and lust of high-ranking figures, Christine laments that her financial problems are due to the fraudulent and avaricious lawyers and debtors who refuse to pay her her due (154–7), and that evil, lubricious tongues have wrongfully accused her of having lovers (157–8).⁸⁸

Christine's identification between herself and Libera as bereft women culminates in a lyric 'ballade' on the fate of widows which she inserts into her complaint.⁸⁹ Whilst holding Fortune responsible for her and Libera's general misfortunes, Christine lays specific blame on those occupying the highest ranks of political and juridical power for the particular sufferings which both individual and state have had to endure. In common with Libera, she criticises the powerful of all estates, including clerks, nobles, knights and judges, for failing to help widows. Yet she reserves her strongest condemnation for the royal princes, since the refrain of the 'ballade' repeats emphatically that they have not acted to protect the interests of widowed women: 'Ne les princes ne les daignent entendre' (159–60).⁹⁰ As Christine goes on to explain later in her complaint, any help she has received from the princes has been too little too late (168). In creating a link between her literal widowhood and the metaphorical widowhood of the state, she castigates the royal princes for their general neglect of the body politic, since it was a commonplace of medieval political theory that the prince should protect the weakest and most vulnerable members of the state, of which widows were a prime example.⁹¹ Christine herself outlines these duties in her other 'mirrors for princes', such as the *Paix*, where she states: 'pourquoy furent establis les princes sur terre ne mais pour aidier et secourir par auctorité de puissance, de corps, de parole, de peine, de reconfort et tout aide non pas seulement les

⁸⁸ Brownlee, 'Widowhood'.

⁸⁹ As Reno, 'Self and Society', 103, n. 32, points out: 'Libera (France) identifies herself as a widow since she has been without a male defender since the death of Charles V. . . Libera experiences the same helplessness as Christine and as the widows described in the ballade, since she is unable to put a stop to the battle waging in the ranks of her children, France's princes.'

⁹⁰ On Christine's self-representation as a widow in her lyric works, see Barbara K. Altmann, 'Les poèmes de veuvage de Christine de Pizan', *Scintilla* (Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto), 1 (1984), 24–47.

⁹¹ See for example, John of Salisbury, *Polycraticus*, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 71.

subgiéz, mais semblablement tous crestiens . . . dames, vesves, orphelins'.⁹² Similarly, in this same work, she evokes Charles V as a model ruler precisely because he *did* concern himself with offering help to women in general:

O! quel douce chose estoit ce à le veoir communement à l'issir de la messe donner audience a toutes gent povres et autres. Là veist on gentilz femmes et tous estas, grandes, moyennes et petites. Ne se glissoit pas d'entre elles comme cocq sur brise, par ennuy de les ouir, en disant à ses gens privéz: Prenez leurs requestes, comme s'il n'en feist conte, ains lui meismes si arestoit, les oyait à loisir tous et toutes de renc parler, leurs requestes faisoit lire, et responce tres benigne leur donnoit.⁹³

Christine's complaint, far from being merely an account of her personal misfortunes, therefore contributes to the overall political message of the *Avision* by using her widowhood as a potent symbol to implicate the princes of the realm for their part in causing suffering to all members of the body politic.

Although Philosophie does not comment *directly* on Christine's political identification with Libera, the response which she provides to her complaint offers both a consolation to Christine on an individual level and a lesson in ethics to the princely reader who must act to restore the political well-being of the state. Each of these aspects of her teaching will now be discussed in turn.

The consolation of Philosophie

Philosophie's response to Christine, which is heavily indebted to Boethian stoicism, involves changing the way in which one perceives the material circumstances of one's life rather than actually seeking to change those circumstances themselves. The first step of Philosophie's teaching to Christine is to show her how she has interpreted her life purely on a literal and material level by relying on the experience of her fallible senses rather than on a higher form of understanding: 'Certes, amie, a tes paroles cognois comment fole faveur te decoipt es jugemens de ton meismes estat' (169, lines 26–7).⁹⁴ As Stephen Kruger has remarked of a similar process undergone by the protagonist of the Middle English text, *Piers Plowman*, self-exploration of the type undertaken by Christine in her complaint has fallen foul of the danger 'that the self will seem an end

⁹² *Paix*, 149.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹⁴ *Vision*, xxxix.

sufficient to itself and become the sole and ultimate object of its own attention'.⁹⁵ Philosophie therefore criticises Christine for having succumbed to an egotistical urge to assume that all material misfortunes, including even the death of King Charles V, have been deliberately brought about by Fortune to afflict her personally: 'il semble que vuelles appliquier a aventure quant tu dis que Fortune t'en despouilla, tout ainsi comme se autre chose ne eust a faire fors soy occuper pour tes nuisances' (170, lines 33–4 – 171, lines 1–2).

In order to correct this type of literal misinterpretation, Philosophie's next step is to remind Christine that it is God, not Fortune, who has determined the course of her existence, stating that it is He who is responsible for making her drink what she perceives to be the cup of bitterness (169). Philosophie makes Christine reject a value-system dominated by Fortune, which relates exclusively to material affairs, and embrace instead a spiritual value-system decreed by God. As Philosophie goes on to explain, this providential system works by directly inverting the material values which Christine had thought true. Recalling the scriptural prophecy 'deposuit potentes' which Libera had quoted in Book I, whereby the mighty shall be cast down and the lowly raised up high, Philosophie informs Christine that although she may consider herself unfortunate in material terms, she is in fact very fortunate in spiritual terms: 'Si dis que tu juges folement, car ne sont pas infortunéz au regart des distribucions justes de dieu les plus persecutéz; ains sont les plus beneuréz en tant comme plus s'approchent de la vie jhesucrist' (172, lines 3–6). Looking at Christine's life from this non-literal perspective, Philosophie persuades her that what she has taken as the pain of suffering visited upon her by God is actually a sign of salvation, not of punishment or damnation.

The final stage of Philosophie's consolation to Christine is to encourage her to re-think her own fortunes for their general significance in the light of Christian eschatology. Philosophie demonstrates to her that human life should not be interpreted according to a linear, horizontal axis, marked only by an accumulation of material benefits, but along a vertical axis, one which determines how she stands in relation to God and a place in Paradise: 'Or regarde a quel prejudice tourment les delices quant ilz ramainent la volenté qui

⁹⁵ Stephen F. Kruger, 'Mirrors and the trajectory of vision in *Piers Plowman*', *Speculum* 66 (1991), 74–95, 74.

doit suivre raison a tele bestialité que elle . . . ne se lieve ne regarde a son propre lieu naturel qui est le ciel' (176, lines 15–18). In order for Christine to know true happiness, Philosophie encourages her to re-interpret her life along this vertical spiritual axis.⁹⁶ She expresses this idea through the metaphor of the stomach: it is not Christine's food, either the rich delicacies of her prosperous days or the thin, bitter fare of her misfortunes, which matters, but how the stomach of her 'entendement' (170, line 5) can cope with them as experiences and understand their true significance for her soul.⁹⁷ This particular argument would seem to be taken from St Augustine, who states:

when the good and the wicked suffer alike, the identity of their sufferings does not mean that there is no difference between them. . . . Thus the wicked, under pressure of affliction, execrate God and blaspheme; the good, in the same affliction, offer up prayers and praises. *This shows that what matters is the nature of the sufferer, not the nature of the sufferings.*⁹⁸

Although, as a member of a state in chaos, Christine is powerless to change the actual circumstances of her life, she is encouraged to change her perception of these circumstances in order to take moral and spiritual comfort from both the positive and the negative aspects of her existence. In this way, Christine's mind and soul can benefit from the discomforts and misfortunes which cause her body so much suffering. Philosophie thus employs a somewhat Panglossian reasoning to argue that, on the one hand, Christine has in fact received many blessings from God, such as fine parentage, good health, and worthy offspring (172–5); and on the other, even such disasters as losing her husband have meant that she has been able to devote herself to improving her moral understanding through study (175).

An ethical model for the prince

Having taught Christine how to change her perception of her material circumstances and not to bemoan her lack of wealth and worldly advancement, Philosophie shifts the focus of her teaching to a wider audience, stating that just as Christine's difficulties in understanding what has befallen her are not unique to her as a woman, so the consolation which she can offer her is not intended

⁹⁶ *Vision*, xl.

⁹⁷ On Christine's use of food metaphors in Book III, see Reno, 'Self and Society', 127–9.

⁹⁸ *City of God*, 14, emphasis added.

exclusively for the female sex: 'Mais a celle fin que a de tes amies ou amis semblablement enforméz ou a d'autres simples ou ignorans du colliege crestien a qui ce venra a cognoissance puisse mon remede estre valable, le regisme prouffitable a garison de tel maladie ne te sera par moy vee' (177, lines 32–5 – 178, lines 1–2). As becomes apparent in Philosophie's subsequent remarks, this wider audience specifically targets those, like the implied princely reader, who are rich and powerful. Her lesson is that such figures must learn to change their material priorities for spiritual ones and cease hungering after ever greater power and wealth, since, as both Libera and Opinion had argued, this is the source of the present crisis in the state of France. The *Avision* thus presents Christine to the princely reader as an exemplar who has come to learn that her well-being does not reside in the literal circumstances of her life but in her moral and spiritual reaction to them. In proposing a personal solution to a political problem, the *Avision* is totally in line with the mainstream 'rhetorical' school of medieval political theory typified by Brunetto Latini, which, unlike the 'scholastic' school represented by Marsilio of Padua, advocated individual morality rather than institutional reform as the basis of good government.⁹⁹ Yet, in terms of her gender, Christine would seem perhaps to be an unlikely model for the princely reader. How then does the *Avision* seek to convince him that a woman *can* function as an exemplar in this way?

In common with all of Christine's other texts in defence of women, the *Avision* treats gender as a feature of human identity which, in Aristotelian terms, is 'accidental' rather than 'essential'. For Aristotle, whilst 'the essence of something consists of those of its characteristics on which all its other characteristics in some fashion depend', an accident is a characteristic which is 'accidental or incidental in the sense that [it] may belong as well as not belong [to a subject]'.¹⁰⁰ For instance, the essential characteristics of a horse are that it is a mammal with hooves that makes a neighing sound, but its accidental characteristics are that it could be bay or dun, male or female, etc. Similarly, the essence of humans is that they are sentient, speaking bipeds, whereas the *particular* sex or skin colour which any one individual possesses is a matter of accident. Thus,

⁹⁹ See Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 99, 53–4.

whilst any animal, be it a horse or a human being, is necessarily gendered, there is only a *material* difference and not one of *essence* between the male and female of the same species: men and women are both humans just as stallions and mares are both horses. As Aristotle states in the *Metaphysics*: ‘Male and female are affections proper to “animal” not in virtue of its essence, but in its matter; and hence the same seed can become male or female by being acted upon in a certain way.’¹⁰¹

As we have seen, Christine bases a major section of Book II of the *Avision* on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, albeit probably via St Thomas Aquinas’ commentary on the text. Although her indebtedness to this Aristotelian concept of gender is not explicitly acknowledged, it is clearly seen at the very beginning of Book I of the *Avision*, where she gives an allegorical account of her birth. In this allegory, Christine describes how she existed first as spirit, was then given a *human* shape when her spirit was ‘cooked’ with matter in a mould, but was only endowed by Nature with the biological sex of a woman at the very end of the process, not in the mould itself (75). In accordance with Aristotle, Christine here emphasises that what men and women have in common is both the spiritual essence of the soul *and* the physical essence of the human species; they differ materially only on the accidental level of their particular gender. Christine espouses this argument for the purposes of her defence of women precisely because it was misogynists who asserted that the differences between men and women were essential and not merely accidental or material: for example, the author of the thirteenth-century ‘dit’ *La Contenance des fames*, who claimed that men but not women were created in God’s image.¹⁰² In this respect, we can also see just how far removed Christine is from modern feminist thinkers like Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray who, paradoxically, seek to celebrate women’s sexual difference from men, whereas Christine herself constantly reiterates the shared humanity of the two sexes *despite*

¹⁰¹ Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. John Warrington, (London: Dent, 1956), 325.

¹⁰² *La Contenance des fames*, lines 1–4, in *Three Medieval Views*:

Se homs congnoissoit l’avantage
Que Dieux quant le fist a s’ymage
Li donna – ce fu congnoissance –
Moult auroit au cuer grant poissance.

See also Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6–27.

their sexual difference.¹⁰³ Moreover, whereas modern feminists tend to regard Aristotle unequivocally as a forefather of misogyny in his view of woman as a 'deformed male' whose role in procreation is simply to bear matter rather than to bestow form on the embryo,¹⁰⁴ a view which Christine herself will challenge in the *Cité*, here she would seem to have taken from him just what is useful for her own argument in seeking to prove the essential humanity of the two sexes. In picking her arguments *selectively* from philosophical authorities such as Aristotle, in order to serve her own rhetorical purposes, Christine thus plays the misogynists at their own game.

The importance of this Aristotelian account of gender in the *Avision* is that it allows Christine to present herself as a model for her princely reader. In a crucial passage of Book III, which most critics have overlooked, Christine extends this argument in order to reject gender as an accidental earthly trapping which can only procure material but not spiritual benefits when she contradicts Philosophie's suggestion that swapping places with a powerful prince, and thus her weak female body for that of a strong man, might make her happier (181, lines 6–7). This is highly significant, because both Christine in her complaint and Philosophie in her response consistently emphasise Christine's physical weakness as a 'femme tendre, fresle et pou souffrant' (171, lines 15–16). Indeed, Philosophie explains that it is precisely because Christine is a woman, and thus merely a neophyte in the world of learning (170), that she has had to use simpler language with her than that which she had employed with Boethius, a learned male philosopher.¹⁰⁵ Yet, in accepting that a change of gender would not help her improve her moral and spiritual lot, Christine indicates that gender ceases to be a defining factor as regards how she must actually *respond* to Philosophie's teachings, since these teachings aim to remedy the ignorance of the human mind and the sinfulness of the soul, rather than the physical weaknesses of the body. This rejection of the material advantages

¹⁰³ Hélène Cixous, 'Le rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc* 61 (1975), 39–54; and Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).

¹⁰⁴ On Aristotle's account of procreation see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 39–41. On his influence on medieval science see Vern L. Bullough, 'Medieval medical and scientific views of women', *Viator* 4 (1973), 485–501; Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 28–46; Joan Cadden, 'Medieval scientific and medical views of sexuality: questions of propriety', *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns 14 (1986), 157–71; Claude Thomasset, 'The nature of woman', in Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ed., *A History of Women: Silences of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass./London: Belknap Press, 1992), 43–69.

¹⁰⁵ See Sempé, 'The Consolation'.

afforded by male gender marks a notable difference from the *Mutacion*, in which Christine had suggested that she was metaphorically transformed into a man in order to enable her to take over as head of her family on her husband's death.¹⁰⁶ In downplaying the importance of her physical gender in favour of her human soul in the *Avision*, Christine signals to the princely reader that in view of their shared humanity, he *can* take her as a model for his own spiritual self-examination. The ultimate lesson which the *Avision* seeks to deliver to its princely reader is that when human beings come to understand the consequences of their mortal actions for their immortal soul, sexual difference is utterly irrelevant. In using a woman as an exemplar for a man, the *Avision* contributes to Christine's stand against misogyny by showing that because of the equality of their souls, its teaching is as applicable to an 'inferior' limb of the body politic, a female author, as to its head, a male ruler.

Christine functions as a model for the prince in two interconnected ways: first, in terms of the actual process of self-examination which she has undergone; and secondly, as an implicit exemplar of lowliness, a rhetorical move which, to the modern reader, may perhaps appear to smack more of egotism than of humility! Just as Christine is made to read herself anew, so the princely reader must do likewise for the good both of his own soul and of the state. Philosophie therefore encourages the rich and powerful prince to take his cue from Christine and to bring about an inversion in his own heart by making himself lowly in spiritual terms since, as she points out to Christine, it is the meek like her, who have been downtrodden in this life, who are more likely to be saved in the next: 'Car nonobstant que vous en murmurez par impacience souventes fois, si estes vous plus aptes en la voie de tribulacion a aler ou cielz que ceulz qui sont nourriz es grans delices' (179, lines 20–2). Revealing to the prince the danger that he is in because of his elevated station in life, she asserts – like Boethius' Lady Philosophy – that bad fortune is actually more profitable than good fortune since those, such as the prince, who have known power in this life mistake it for an end in itself, rather than seeing it as an *obstacle* to a higher end, as Opinion too had maintained: 'Et pour ce cuident yceulz que il ne soit autre bien ne plus dure chose que avoir tresors, pierres

¹⁰⁶ *Mutacion*, vol. 1, lines 1321–63. See also *Vision*, 154, n. 68; Andrea Tarnowski, 'Maternity and paternity in *La Mutacion de Fortune*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 116–26.

precieuses et grans seigneuries. O viles dignetés et poissances du monde que entre vous exaussiez jusques au ciel, et ne savez qu'est povoir et vraye digneté!' (185, lines 6–10). Moreover, Philosophie argues that, in implicit contrast to Christine who, as we have seen, had refuted her suggestion that she might consider herself to be happier if she could change places with a powerful and wealthy prince (180–1), the rich are in reality poor because they are subject to 'l'ardeur de convoitise' (181, line 5), a constant desire to satisfy their appetites for wealth, status and luxury.¹⁰⁷ This is because, as Philosophie points out to Christine, her stoical patience will give her an advantage in spiritual terms over the richest of princes since she has obtained self-rule and is no longer subject to a desire for the comforts of the body: 'Car cellui est riche qui plus ne convoite, et cellui est povre qui art en desir' (181, lines 21–2). Philosophie quotes Boethius in order to convince the princely reader of the moral poverty of those who seek after wealth:

Veulz tu, dist il, assembler peccune? Il convient que tu la soubtrayes a qui que soit. Veulz tu avoir digneté? Tu seras ou desdaing des envieux. Veulz tu surmonter les autres? Tu seras en peril des hayneux. . . . Veulx tu delices? Tous ceulx te despriseront qui serf te verront a tes aises. Et pour ce peux noter que tes voies ne font pas l'omme riche, c'est assavoir assouvi. (184, lines 7–14)

This part of Philosophie's teaching echoes one of the chief ethical lessons contained in 'mirrors for princes', which is the need for self-abnegation and humility on the part of the ruler, who should therefore strive for 'le renoncement personnel pour le plus grand dévouement au bien public',¹⁰⁸ a point which Christine herself reiterates in the *Policie*: '[le prince] doit singulierement aimer le bien et l'acroissement de son pays et de son peuple et en ce doit de toute sa puissance et estude vaquer plus mesmes que a son singulier profit'.¹⁰⁹ In Books I and II of the *Avision*, both Libera and Opinion had argued that it was precisely this lack of self-denial on the part of the French nobility which had proved so disastrous for the realm and which needed to be remedied for its political fortunes to be improved.

¹⁰⁷ See *Paix*, 97–8: 'Aucuns pechiéz sont par especial, si que je treuve, qui portent, à proprement dire, leur enfer avec eulx, c'est assavoir envie et convoitise. . . . Convoitise met l'omme, quant il en est espris, à tel soing et tourment qu'il n'a repos pour l'ardeur d'acquerra ne jamais ne lui cesse.'

¹⁰⁸ See Krynen, *Idéal du prince*, 118.

¹⁰⁹ *Policie*, 15.

In order to help the prince learn to disdain material wealth as Christine has done, Philosophie takes a key symbol of earthly power, the crown, and reinterprets it instead as a symbol of spiritual humility. Citing St Bernard of Clairvaux, she declares that the eternal crown of salvation belongs not to those who lead a pampered existence in this life but to those who suffer tribulations with patience: 'Et pour ce qui yci plaiéz de tribulacion n'apperra, ne recevra en l'autre la victoire de la couronne glorieuse' (179, lines 10–12). Philosophie similarly glosses the concept of rulership in a non-literal sense. Once again quoting Boethius, she declares that true happiness consists in having rule over oneself and one's passions rather than rulership over others: 'la pure vraye beneurte est avoir de soy meismes la seigneurie' (182, lines 26–7), an idea which is one of the fundamental tenets of the 'mirror for princes' genre. In the *Policie*, for example, Christine stresses that self-rule for the prince must begin with self-knowledge of his flawed condition and thence the desire to make his reason control his baser instincts:

[E]n ce qui est subject a l'ame, c'est assçavoir deliberacion de voullenté, les influences du ciel n'ont point de seigneurie, non obstant qu'il peut estre vray que l'action du ciel donne a l'omme plusieurs inclinacions, si comme aux aucuns joliveté, luxure, ou autres mouvemens naturelz. *Mais non obstant ce, l'omme y peut mettre frein par raison et resister quant au fait a toutes teles inclinacions.*¹¹⁰

As in the glossed image of the crown, Philosophie's reinterpretation of rulership teaches the prince that, unlike the material benefits of wealth and power attached to earthly rule which are necessarily transient, the spiritual benefits of self-governance are eternal and cannot be taken away (187, lines 4–7).

Just as Christine has learnt that she must disregard gender and the body as merely an accidental earthly trapping, so the prince is made to strip himself mentally of all his material advantages in order to perceive his true spiritual essence underneath. Quoting Seneca's Epistle 87, Philosophie emphasises this need to peel away the layers down to the physical body, and then to look beyond even the body for the real state of one's soul: 'Se tu veulz avoir, dist il, la vraye extimacion de l'omme et savoir quel ou quant grant il est, regardes le tout nu. Ostes son patrimoine, oste ses honneurs et les autres mençonges de Fortune, et le regardes se tu peus non pas ou corps

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 77, emphasis added.

mais ou courage' (186, lines 12–15). Thus the prince, like Christine or any other human being, will be judged according to his sins and his good deeds, not his material privileges. Christine echoes this view in the *Policie*, where she reminds the prince of the transience of his earthly life:

quant il estudiera la loy de Dieu par en estre bien enformé si comme doit estre tout bon crestien il avisera le peril de iceulx biens au regart de l'ame, c'est assavoir que se bien n'en use il est perdu et le fais de la grandeur de seigneurie qu'il a n'est que ung droit office transitoire de peu de duree et qu'il couvient laisser en brief temps.¹¹¹

Similarly, in the 'Vivat Rex', Gerson warns rulers that they are not immune from the corrupt human condition, as their flatterers would have them believe. For Gerson, the true counsellor to a ruler should remind him constantly that his body is merely a perishable material object and not a source of any kind of spiritual advantage: 'Tu es un sac plain de fiens, terre et cendre et pourriture, quelque robe que tu aiez, quelque or, argent ou pierre precieuse, ou pompeuse famille soynt environ toy.'¹¹²

Philosophie's final words emphasise how the solution she has offered to Christine is equally valid for the prince when she states that since the source of true happiness is charity, the problem of disunity either within the self or within the state is resolved in oneness with God: 'par nature il n'est que un dieu et par participation il en est moult' (189, lines 5–6). Christine too explicitly makes this connection when she acknowledges that Philosophie's theological lessons are not meant for her exclusive benefit. She declares that theology acts as a unifying doctrine because it underpins physics, which governs the natural world, ethics, which governs individual conduct, and politics, which governs the rule of the state. Since, as she claims, the end point of all these three disciplines is the knowledge and love of God, theology is presented as an answer which produces the kind of certainty and truth which Opinion could not provide. Christine's solution to the political crisis evoked throughout the *Avison*, as it has been revealed to her by all three allegorical Ladies, is that individual faith and charity will bind the state together: 'car nulle cité n'est mieulx garde'e que par le fondement et liam de foy et de ferme concorde a amer le bien commun, qui est tres vray et tres souverain' (191, lines 19–21). The equation

¹¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹¹² 'Vivat Rex', 1162–3.

of theology with these three disciplines therefore gives the lie to the view sometimes expressed by critics, that at the end of the *Avision* the text signals a rejection of the world on Christine's part.¹¹³ Although Philosophie's consolation is intended to strengthen Christine's faith and to encourage her to reject the superfluities of the world, it does not recommend that she become a mystic opting for a life of contemplation.¹¹⁴ Rather, by Christine's own example, the *Avision* seeks to teach the princely reader how to live a moral existence in the corrupt world so as to ensure his eternal life in the spiritual world.

CONCLUSION

Christine's *Avision* combines the four elements of politics, autobiography, allegory and gender into a highly complex work. As a 'mirror for princes', the *Avision* intervenes directly in the political crisis of its time, using the allegorical fiction of a dream-vision to deliver a coded, but nonetheless urgent message to its princely reader. The text puts autobiography at the service of this political message in showing how the lessons contained in the personal consolation of an individual can also help bring about the public consolation of the state, by persuading the head of that state to act as a moral being who is motivated by charity rather than self-love. Finally, the *Avision* employs the interpretive methods of allegory to encourage the male reader to look at gender in a different light. As the prince watches Christine gaze into the mirror which Philosophie holds up to her, he is taught to see not just the physical body of a woman but also her inner soul which, like his own, is revealed in all its *human* imperfections: 'Car toy, saintte theologie, as un mirouer qui monstre les ordures et les aprent a nettoyer' (192, lines 9–10). In terms of Christine's championing of her sex, the *Avision* should be seen as a companion piece to the *Othéa* in which the author similarly exhorts the prince to gloss its female exemplars for the non-literal meanings of their stories. In both these texts addressed to the male reader, Christine's rhetorical strategies for countering misogynist doctrine are very different from those of many modern feminists, since she argues that what unites male and female as human souls is

¹¹³ See, for example, Durley, 'The Crowned Dame'; and *Vision*, xxxvi.

¹¹⁴ See Blanchard, 'Christine de Pizan', 432–3.

more important than what divides them as sexual beings, an argument which is central to her defence of women as a whole. If the *Othéa* and the *Avision* are thus *implicitly* anti-misogynist in assuming the equal moral potential of both sexes, in the *Cité*, to which we now turn, Christine *explicitly* refutes misogynist doctrine for the benefit of her female reader.

CHAPTER 4

The 'Livre de la Cité des Dames': generic transformation and the moral defence of women

The *Cité* (1405) is Christine de Pizan's most famous work, yet despite, or perhaps because of, this fact it is also the most controversial. In this text, Christine tackles the problem of misogyny head-on, offering an alternative view of history in which women's contribution as historical figures is fully recognised.¹ It also marks an important genre shift from Christine's previous works such as the *Othéa* and the *Avision*: from the instructive mirror for male readers she switches to a commemorative catalogue of women's laudable deeds addressed to a female readership.² Moreover, whereas in the *Othéa* and the *Avision* Christine was concerned to encourage her reader to look beyond gender for the essential humanity embodied in her female exemplars, in the *Cité* she attempts to valorise what women have achieved as a sex in their own right.³

This text enjoyed great popularity among Christine's immediate contemporaries and had a substantial readership well into the sixteenth century, although the actual number of complete extant manuscripts of the work (twenty-five) is only about half of that which survives for the *Othéa*.⁴ The *Cité* was translated into Flemish in 1475

¹ All page references in the body of this chapter are to the *Cité*, vol. 2, unless otherwise stated. For modern English translations of the text see Earl Jeffrey Richards, trans., *The Book of the City of Ladies* (London: Pan Books, 1983), and Rosalind Brown-Grant, trans., *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999).

² On the catalogue genre, see Duane Reed Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928); Arnaldo D. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography: Four Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Ruth Morse, 'Medieval biography: history as a branch of literature', *Modern Language Review* 80,2 (1985), 257–68.

³ For a general introduction to the *Cité*, see Willard, *Life*, 135–45.

⁴ *Cité*, vol. 1, 346–589. See also Kennedy, *Guide*, items 386–91.

and English in 1521, and had a considerable influence on French writers such as Martin le Franc who contributed to the developing 'querelle des femmes' of the mid-fifteenth century.⁵ The text even provided the subject matter for a series of tapestries, now sadly lost, which was presented to Margaret of Austria in 1513.⁶

Paradoxically, given the favourable reception that the *Cité* received in a period when the misogynist tradition was still so influential, it is amongst twentieth-century readers who have long since rejected misogyny as a respectable doctrine that the *Cité* has provoked the most controversy. The question of its feminism has been hotly debated by modern scholars, with some, like Delany, criticising the text's conservatism in presenting examples which are almost exclusively aristocratic,⁷ whilst others, such as Quilligan, have praised its ability to anticipate 'modern feminist critiques of Freudian theories about the oedipal complex and female sexuality'.⁸ However, in judging the *Cité* according to their own, modern criteria such critics have failed to study the text in its own *medieval* terms.⁹ A more historical approach has been provided by those scholars who have analysed how Christine's *Cité* re-works the stories of famous women

⁵ See *Cité*, vol. 1, 269–89, for a discussion of the text's influence on French, Spanish and English literature; and 300–45, for a discussion of the translations.

⁶ See Susan Groag Bell, 'A lost tapestry: Margaret of Austria's *Cité des Dames*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 449–67; and Bell, 'A new approach to the influence of the *Cité des Dames*: the lost tapestries of "The City of Ladies"', in Ribémont, *Sur le chemin*, 7–12.

⁷ Delany, '"Mothers"'.
⁸

Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 42n; Quilligan, 'Allegory and the textual body: female authority in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *Romanic Review* (1989), 222–48; and Quilligan, 'The allegory of female authority: Christine de Pizan and canon formation', in Joan DeJean and Nancy K. Miller, eds., *Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literatures in French* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 126–43. See also Lynne Huffer, 'Christine de Pisan: speaking like a woman/speaking like a man', in Edelgard E. DuBruck, ed., *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays toward a Cultural Anthropology*, Medieval Studies, 1 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 61–72.

⁹ For assessments of Christine's feminism which pay closer attention to her historical context, see Susan Schibanoff, 'Comment on Kelly's "Early feminist theory and the *Querelle des femmes*, 1400–1789"', *Signs* 11 (1983), 320–6; Beatrice Gottlieb, 'The problem of feminism in the fifteenth century', in Julius Kirschner and Suzanne F. Wemple, eds., *Women of the Medieval World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 337–64. For an idiosyncratic view of Christine as a compiler merely adopting the mask of feminist reader in order to legitimate the re-working of her sources, see Joël Blanchard, 'Compilation et légitimation au XVe siècle', *Poétique* 19 (1988), 139–57.

which she had drawn from earlier texts, of which the most important is Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*.¹⁰ Yet in discussing solely the *content* of these stories, such scholars have neglected the fact that in order to conduct her critique of misogyny, Christine was also obliged to modify the formal and generic framework which she took from her source material.¹¹ Only Glenda McLeod, in an important and insightful study, has attempted to analyse the *Cité* from this perspective and shown how Christine's work re-casts the generic conventions of the biographical catalogue in her efforts to combat anti-feminist views.¹² For McLeod, Christine's innovations anticipate the form, if not the substantive arguments, of the catalogue genre of the Renaissance period.

If the criteria by which modern scholars have assessed the conservatism or radicalism of Christine's feminist ideas have shed little light on what she was actually attempting to achieve in the *Cité*, on what grounds *did* she seek here to refute misogyny? How did Christine's re-working of the generic context of her sources enable

¹⁰ See, for example, Alfred Jeanroy, 'Boccace et Christine de Pisan', *Romania* 48 (1922), 93–105; Carla Bozzolo, 'Il Decamerone come fonte del *Livre de la Cité des Dames* di Christine de Pizan', in Franco Simone, ed., *Miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1967), 3–24; Christine M. Reno, 'Christine de Pisan's use of the *Golden Legend* in the *Cité des Dames*', *Les Bonnes Feuilles* 3,2 (1974), 89–99; Liliane Dulac, 'Un mythe didactique chez Christine de Pizan: Sémiramis ou la veuve héroïque (du *De Claris Mulieribus* à la *Cité des Dames*)', *Mélanges de philologie romane offerts à Charles Camproux* (Montpellier: Centre d'Etudes Occitanes, 1978), 315–43; Patricia A. Phillippy, 'Establishing authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*', *Romanic Review* 77 (1986), 167–93; Kevin Brownlee, 'Il Decameron di Boccaccio e la *Cité des Dames* di Christine de Pizan: modelli e contro-modelli', *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991–2), 232–51; Carol M. Meale, 'Legends of good women in the European Middle Ages', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 144,1 (1992), 55–70; Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, 'Problèmes de réécriture: amour et mort de la princesse de Salerne dans le *Decameron* (IV, 1) et dans la *Cité des Dames* (II, 59)', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 209–20; and Anna Slerca, 'Dante, Boccace, et le *Livre de la Cité des Dames* de Christine de Pizan', *ibid.*, 221–30. For studies comparing the illustrations of manuscripts of the *Cité des Dames* with those in the French translations of Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, see Sandra L. Hindman, 'With ink and mortar: Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*: an art essay', *Feminist Studies* 10 (1984), 457–84; and Maureen Quilligan, 'Translating dismemberment: Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan', *Studi sul Boccaccio* 20 (1991–2), 253–66.

¹¹ On the significance of Christine's rhetorical style in the *Cité des Dames*, see Maureen Cheney Curnow, '"La pioche d'inquisition": legal-judicial content and style in Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 157–72; Glenda K. McLeod, 'Poetics and antimisogynist polemics in Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *ibid.*, 37–47; Kevin Brownlee, 'Literary genealogy and the problem of the father: Christine de Pizan and Dante', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 23,3 (1993), 365–87.

¹² Glenda K. McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogues of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

her to conduct a defence of women in this text?¹³ In order to understand the significance of Christine's rhetorical strategies in the *Cité*, we need to contrast her work not just with Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* but also with two other key texts in the catalogue genre with which she would have been familiar: Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*¹⁴ and Petrarch's *De Viris Illustribus*.¹⁵ On the one hand, as McLeod has pointed out, the *Cité* is similar in structure to the *De Casibus*,¹⁶ although, as we shall see, it differs markedly from Boccaccio's text in terms of its aims. On the other hand, Petrarch's *De Viris*, though concerned almost exclusively with famous men, was the *auctoritas* upon which Boccaccio claimed to have modelled his catalogue of women.¹⁷ Yet whilst ostensibly basing its treatment of women on Petrarch's enthusiastic *celebration* of men, Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* in fact provides a very ambiguous view of the female sex, since its criteria for inclusion are much less positive than those put forward in the *De Viris*. As a result, Christine was obliged to return to some of the organising principles used in Petrarch's catalogue as a corrective to the equivocation displayed in Boccaccio's ambivalent text. It is impossible to *prove* that Christine had direct knowledge of the *De Viris*, since there is no mention of any manuscripts of it in those Parisian libraries to which she is known to have had access when she was writing the *Cité*.¹⁸ However, through both her father's Italian connections at the University of Bologna, where Petrarch had

¹³ For an earlier version of this discussion, see Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Des hommes et des femmes illustres: modalités narratives et transformations génériques chez Pétrarque, Boccace et Christine de Pizan', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 469–80.

¹⁴ For English translations of these texts see Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Fates of Illustrious Men*, ed. and trans. Lewis Brewer Hall (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), hereafter referred to as *Illustrious Men*; and Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), hereafter referred to as *Famous Women*. All translations of passages from these works will refer to these editions, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵ For a parallel translation into modern Italian of extracts from the *De Viris*, see Francesco Petrarca, *Prose Latine*, ed. Guido Martellotti *et al.* (Milan/Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955), 218–69.

¹⁶ McLeod, *Virtue*, 116.

¹⁷ *De Mulieribus*, 22. See also Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, trans. Richard Morges and Denise J. McAuliffe (New York University Press, 1976), 110; McLeod, *Virtue*, 62.

¹⁸ See Elizabeth Pellegrin, 'Manuscrits de Pétrarque dans les bibliothèques de France', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 4 (1961), 341–431; 6 (1963), 271–364; 7 (1964), 405–522; Gianni Mombello, 'I manoscritti delle opere di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio nelle principali librerie francesi del secolo XV', in C. Pellegrini, ed., *Il Boccaccio nella cultura francese, Atti del Convegno di Studi L'opera del Boccaccio nella Cultura Francese*, Certaldo, 2–6 settembre 1968, Pubblicazioni dell'Ente Nazionale Giovanni Boccaccio, 1 (Florence: Olschki, 1971), 81–209.

been a student,¹⁹ and her own Parisian connections with the circles of early humanist intellectuals who were also familiar with Petrarch's work, Christine may have had access to a copy of the *De Viris*. As scholars have shown, she certainly knew of Petrarch's other texts, to which she was indebted both in the *Cité* (806), where she cites from his *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, and in her lyric poems.²⁰

As in other works in the catalogue genre, the plethora of examples provided in the *Cité* threatens to overwhelm modern readers and to make them lose sight of Christine's overall aims in the text. In order to show the unity of her defence of women across all three books of the *Cité*, this chapter will explore how Christine re-works both the formal conventions which she inherited from Petrarch and Boccaccio, such as the title and the prefatory sections of the catalogue genre, as well as the concept of history underpinning the choice of examples which each author offered for the reader's education. This comparative and thematic approach will allow us to see first, why the title of the *Cité* diverges radically from those found in Boccaccio and Petrarch's texts; secondly, how Christine constructs a different kind of relationship between author, reader and text in her prologue to the *Cité*, compared to those outlined by her male predecessors in their prefaces and dedications; and thirdly, how her view of history and set of *exempla* seek to empower her female reader by valorising key areas of women's experience, as opposed to the historical perspectives and examples adopted in the *De Viris*, *De Casibus* and *De Mulieribus*.

TELLING TITLES: CONCERNING FAMOUS OR INFAMOUS WOMEN?

Petrarch's *De Viris* represents what one critic has called a 'restoration' of the biographical catalogue genre, first developed in Antiquity.²¹ The work underwent several different redactions between 1337 and 1374, since Petrarch hesitated as to whether he should use exclusively Roman *exempla* or include stories from the Old Testament as

¹⁹ Willard, *Life*, 18–20.

²⁰ See Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan, the conventions of courtly diction, and Italian humanism', in his *Reinterpreting*, 250–71; Lori Walters, 'Chivalry and the (en)gendered poetic self: Petrarchan models in the *Cent Balades*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 43–66.

²¹ Pierre de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1907), vol. 2, 2.

well.²² The title of the text recalls works by Suetonius, Plutarch, Pliny, St Jerome and Giovanni Colonna, a contemporary of Petrarch's. Petrarch's aim in this work, like that of his predecessors, is clear from his use of the adjective 'illustis': to seek to write the history of those heroes whose fame is derived from their civic and military virtues.²³

Though written in the same genre as Petrarch's text, Boccaccio's *De Casibus*, composed around 1358, undertook a complete transformation of both the genre's objectives and its narrative conventions.²⁴ This transformation is hinted at in the title itself: the noun 'casus', meaning 'downfall' in Latin, indicates that his work is exclusively concerned with moral lessons of behaviour to be avoided rather than with historical *exempla* of deeds to be emulated.²⁵ From the very start, the reader must expect to find stories dealing not with acts of heroism but with the downfall of heroic men and women which occurred in spite of their noble qualities.²⁶

Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus*, begun around 1361 and revised in nine successive editorial phases up to 1375,²⁷ has often been regarded simply as a 'complement' to his earlier work, the *De Casibus*, but in fact the relationship between the two texts is rather more complex than this view would suggest.²⁸ Indeed, on first acquaintance the *De Mulieribus* seems totally different in aim and conception from Boccaccio's earlier work. The *De Casibus* is a virulent attack on the mores of both past and present generations, whereas the *De Mulieribus* seems to present itself as a celebration of the illustrious women of the past. But the title of Boccaccio's catalogue of women is somewhat misleading: although it appears to be closer to the title of

²² See Benjamin G. Kohl, 'Petrarch's prefaces to the *De Viris Illustribus*', *History and Theory* 13,2 (1974), 132–44, for a summary of the different versions.

²³ See Pierre de Nolhac, 'Le *De Viris Illustribus* de Pétrarque: notice sur les manuscrits originaux, suivie de fragments inédits', *Notices et extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et d'autres bibliothèques* 34 (1891), 61–148; Carlo Calcaterra, *Nella Selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Editore Licinio Cappelli, 1942), 415–33.

²⁴ Massimo Miglio, 'Boccaccio biografo', in Gilbert Tournoy, ed., *Boccaccio in Europe: Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, Dec. 1975* (Leuven University Press, 1977), 149–63.

²⁵ *De Casibus*, xlviii.

²⁶ See Atilio Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio* (Trieste: Julius Dase Editrice, 1879), 117–51; Henri Hauvette, *Boccaccio: étude biographique et littéraire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1914), 347–96; Annalisa Carraro, 'Tradizioni culturali e storiche nel *De Casibus*', *Studi sul Boccaccio* 12 (1980), 197–262.

²⁷ Branca, *Boccaccio*, 110.

²⁸ Peter Godman, 'Chaucer and Boccaccio's Latin works', in Piero Boitani, ed., *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 269–95; McLeod, *Virtue*, 77, n. 29.

Petrarch's text than to that of the *De Casibus*, Boccaccio does not in fact use the adjective 'clarus' as a strict synonym for 'illustris', the term used by Petrarch and his classical predecessors, since 'clarus' has connotations not only of fame but also of infamy.²⁹ Furthermore, though there is no hint in the title of the *De Mulieribus* of the tragic overtones implied by the term 'casus', over half of the stories which it recounts do in fact feature women whose lives ended tragically.³⁰

Unlike the *De Mulieribus*, the title of Christine's *Cité* makes no obvious reference to 'famous women' but simply tells us that the text concerns 'dames', without explaining why they have been chosen in the first instance. Christine thus avoids using terms to indicate fame which have any negative connotations. More importantly, she introduces an idea which is absent in all previous catalogues: that of the 'cité'. This extremely rich symbol functions in several interrelated ways in the text. First, it connects Christine's text to St Augustine's *City of God*, a work which the *Cité* explicitly invokes once its building process is complete, stating 'Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, civitas dei' (1031). The two texts are linked as universal histories of those virtuous figures of the past 'who deserved to reign eternally with God',³¹ although Christine's work is universal in the sense that it includes both Christian and pagan women. Secondly, Christine, following Augustine, makes the city into the classic symbol of the ideal community held together by its common pursuit of virtue,³² one constructed around a hierarchy of female warriors, good wives and saintly women. Thirdly, as we shall see, the idea of the city is also important for one of the central arguments of her work, namely that women have contributed to the development of civilisation as

²⁹ McLeod, *Virtue*, 64–5.

³⁰ Of the 104 stories recounted in the *De Mulieribus*, forty-seven concern women who either died an unhappy death through suicide or murder, or died in ignominious circumstances. Examples of suicides include Thisbe (66–71), Jocasta (108–9) and Lucretia (194–7). Examples of women killed include Cassandra (140–3), Cleopatra (344–57) and Agrippina, mother of Nero (366–75). Examples of women who died ingloriously include Soaemias (400–6) and Pope Joan (414–19). Another forty-three stories deal with women who both lived and died in glory and praise: such women include the Sibyls Erythraea (94–7) and Almathea (110–13), the virtuous wife Gaia (190–1), and the learned women Hortensia (332–5) and Cornificia (338–9). The remaining fourteen stories deal with women whose end Boccaccio does not in fact recount, including Helen of Troy (146–53) and the goddesses Ceres (42–7) and Minerva (48–53), who were considered to be immortal.

³¹ Hindman, 'With ink', 471.

³² See *City of God*, 890, for Augustine's definition of a community as 'an association of some kind or other between a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of its love'.

epitomised by the urban community, and have themselves played a prominent role as city-builders and as intellectuals.³³ Finally, as Reno has argued, Christine's city is a defensive fortress containing only virtuous women, many of them virgins.³⁴ It thus provides a counterpoint to Jean de Meung's stormed castle of female chastity, symbol of the Rose's implicit collusion in her own downfall. By its title alone, Christine's text signals its difference from that of its precursors in the biographical catalogue genre: unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio's works, the *Cité* calls the reader's attention to its status as polemical panegyric designed not only to *praise* but moreover to *defend* the female sex.

PREFATORY REMARKS: THREE AUTHORS IN SEARCH OF AUTHORITY

The opening passages of these catalogues by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Christine are crucial in outlining the roles of the author and the reader in their texts. However, Christine was to adopt a rather different set of strategies from those employed by her male predecessors, for establishing both her literary authority and her relationship with the reader.

Like its title, the long authorial preface which Petrarch added to the second version of the *De Viris* in 1351–3³⁵ attests to the roles which he envisaged both for himself as author and for his implied reader.³⁶ Petrarch's view of his contemporaries is unambiguous: to his mind, they persist in pursuing vice and totally neglect virtue.³⁷ His duty, therefore, is to call his compatriots back to reason, to show

³³ Bernard Ribémont, 'De l'architecture à l'écriture: Christine de Pizan et la *Cité des Dames*', in J.-M. Pastre, ed., *La Ville: du réel à l'imaginaire, Colloque du 8 au 10 novembre 1988* (Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 1991), 27–35.

³⁴ Christine M. Reno, 'Virginity as an ideal in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*', in Bornstein, *Ideals*, 69–90. See also Thomas M. Greene, *Besieging the Castle of Ladies*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Occasional Papers, 4 (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995).

³⁵ See Kohl, 'Petrarch's prefaces'; L. R. Lind, 'Petrarch's Preface B to *De Viris Illustribus*: the approach to modern historiography', *Classical and Modern Quarterly* 7, 1 (1986), 7–12. For the Latin text of this long preface, see *Prose Latine*, 218–27.

³⁶ Antonio Viscardi, 'Francesco Petrarca storiografo', *La Cultura* 2 (1923), 491–9; Calcaterra, *Nella selva*; Guido Martellotti, 'Storiografia del Petrarca', in Michele Feo and Silvia Rosso, eds., *Scritti petrarcheschi* (Padua: Antenore, 1983), 475–86.

³⁷ In the short preface added to the version of 1371–4, dedicated to the Paduan prince Francesco da Carrara, Petrarch understandably omits this invective against his contemporaries. For the Latin text of this preface see *De Viris*, vol. 1, 3–5; for an English translation see 'Petrarch's prefaces', 142–4.

them the path which leads to moral and civic glory by means of illustrious examples from the past. He expresses nothing but scorn for contemporary princes whose deeds, he claims, are more suitable for inclusion in a book of satire than in a record of the great and the good (*De Viris*, 218). When modern princes do manage to bring off some prodigious feat, it is more thanks to their good fortune than as a result of their intrinsic merit (*ibid.*). Petrarch insists that he is concerned only to recount the actions of those heroic individuals who had no need to appeal to Fortune: 'neque ego fortunatos sed illustres sum pollicitus viros' (*De Viris*, 222) (I have not promised [to describe] lucky men, but illustrious ones, 'Petrarch's prefaces', 140).

As to his own authorial status Petrarch is categorical: his aim is to insert himself into the tradition of laudatory historical writing, to write an *epitome*, a selected compendium of his sources, in line with Horatian principles (*ibid.*). Like his forerunners, he aims to obtain as accurate a narrative as possible, by using only the most reliable sources and by avoiding unnecessary digressions (*ibid.*). He seeks to emulate his favourite historiographer, Livy,³⁸ and to show the reader which examples he should try to follow and which to shun:

fructuosus historici finis est, illa prosequi que vel sectanda legentibus vel fugienda sunt, ut in utranque partem copia suppetat illustrium exemplorum. (*De Viris*, 224)

(this is the profitable goal for the historian: to point up to the reader those things that are to be followed and those to be avoided, with plenty of distinguished examples provided on either side.) ('Petrarch's prefaces', 141)

If, in accordance with the traditional didactic aims of the genre, Petrarch's chief concern is to exhort the reader to imitate the famous deeds of the Romans, Boccaccio in the *De Casibus* proposes a very different relationship between reader and text. To the dedicatee of his work, his friend Mainardo dei Cavalcanti, he explains his hesitations as to the choice of a patron. He would have wished to dedicate his text to a pope, prince or emperor worthy of the name, but not one of those who came to mind did he deem fit to receive this honour (*De Casibus*, 2–4).³⁹ In the preface, Boccaccio attacks the decadence into which his compatriots have fallen, employing a tone more direct and severe than that used by Petrarch:

³⁸ Myron P. Gilmore, 'The Renaissance conception of the lessons of history', in his *Humanists and Jurists: Six Studies in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1963), 1–31.

³⁹ *Illustrious Men* omits the text of the dedication. My translation is therefore provided for quotations.

maiori tamen conatu in mentem sese ingessere principum atque presidentium quorumcunque obscene libidines, violentie truces, perdita ocia, avaritie inexplebiles, cruenta odia, ultiones armate precipitesque et longe plura scelestas facinora. (*De Casibus*, 8)

(I particularly remembered the obscene lustfulness of princes and of those who command in general, their vicious deceits, shameful indolence, insatiable greed, bloodthirsty hatred, ferocious vendettas, and countless other wicked deeds.) (my translation).⁴⁰

Rather than encouraging his contemporaries to pursue earthly glory, as Petrarch did, Boccaccio's explicit aim is to persuade them to look to the good of their souls and so avoid the fate of the characters in his text, many of whom fell because of their hubris. In the *De Casibus*, Boccaccio seeks to reveal the workings of Fortune and to help his contemporary readers break free from her endless cycle of rise and fall by inculcating in them a spirit of *contemptus mundi* (*De Casibus*, 10). As for his own authorship, Boccaccio, like Petrarch, acknowledges that he is following in the footsteps of illustrious antecedents (the most important of whom is again Livy), whilst expressing confidence in his own writerly talents. Indeed, using a humility topos, he lays claim to a didactic authority which is all the more effective for having a humble origin: 'cum meminerim non nunquam rudem voculam excivisse non nullos quos tonitrua movisse non poterant' (*De Casibus*, 8) (since I remembered that sometimes an unpolished little voice has succeeded with those whom even thunder could not rouse [my translation]).⁴¹

Likewise, in both the dedication and the preface of the *De Mulieribus*, Boccaccio sets out the relationship between this text and its implied reader. As Petrarch did, so Boccaccio here encourages his reader to imitate or even surpass the virtue of his pagan examples: 'Nec incassum, arbitrator, agitabitur lectio si, facinorum preteritarum mulierum emula, egregium animum tuum concitabis in melius' (*De Mulieribus*, 20) (Your reading of this book will not be a waste of time, it seems to me, if you emulate the deeds of these women of the past, and turn your mind to even better things [my translation]).⁴² However, this *imitatio* is made problematic by the fact that, for the

⁴⁰ The translation of this passage offered in *Illustrious Men*, 1, is somewhat inadequate: 'These rulers are so attracted to vice and debauchery, are so unrestrained.'

⁴¹ The translation of this passage offered by *Illustrious Men*, 1, is imprecise: 'I believe it is my duty, though my skills are not equal to theirs, to try to penetrate their guard.'

⁴² *Famous Women* omits the text of the dedication. My translation is therefore provided for quotations.

most part, Boccaccio identifies virtue ('virtus') with man ('vir'), an association which he continues in much of the text itself.⁴³ In this respect, he would seem to be following the medieval penchant for essentialising male and female nature on pseudo-etymological grounds, popularised by Isidore of Seville who first made this link between 'vir' and 'virtus', as well as claiming that the word for woman ('mulier') came from the word meaning softer or weaker ('mollier'), which was derived from the substantive meaning weakness ('mollitie').⁴⁴ Thus, in the dedication to his patroness Andrea Acciaiuoli, Boccaccio declares her to be the equal of the virtuous women of the past, although he qualifies this praise by deeming her an exception among her contemporaries, a point he explains by the fact of her masculine-sounding name: 'cum andres Greci quod latine dicimus homines nuncupent' (*De Mulieribus*, 20) (as *andres* in Greek means *men* in Latin [my translation]). This double-edged praise is matched by a similar comment in the preface, where Boccaccio reproduces Isidore's terminology to the effect that women should be praised for overcoming their innate weakness of mind and body:

Et si extollendi sunt homines dum, concesso sibi robore, magna perfecerint, quanto amplius mulieres, quibus fere omnibus a natura rerum mollities insita et corpus debile ac tardum ingenium datum est, si in virilem evaserint animum et ingenio celebri atque virtute conspicua audeant atque perficiant etiam difficillima viris, extollende sunt? (*De Mulieribus*, 24, emphasis added)

(If men should be praised whenever they perform great deeds (with strength which Nature has given them), how much more should women be extolled (almost all of whom are endowed with tenderness, frail bodies, and sluggish minds by Nature), if they have acquired a manly spirit and if with keen intelligence and remarkable fortitude they have dared to undertake and have accomplished even deeds which would be very difficult for men?) (*Famous Women*, xxxvii, translation slightly amended)

Moreover, throughout his dedication, Boccaccio praises his patroness by comparing her favourably to other contemporary women, of whom he undertakes a subtle but trenchant critique. For example, in exhorting Andrea to even greater virtue than she already

⁴³ See Constance Jordan, 'Boccaccio's in-famous women: gender and civic virtue in the *De Claris Mulieribus*', in Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson, eds., *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 25–47. Examples of women praised by Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus* for their virile qualities include the Minyan wives (128–35), Penthesilea (135–7), Artemisia (228–37), Sophonisba (278–85), Hortensia (332–5), Cornificia (338–9), and Epicharus (374–81).

⁴⁴ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 43–5.

possesses, he encourages her to seek to embellish herself further, but not in the usual way which most women do, that is with cosmetics (*De Mulieribus*, 22). Whilst flattering his patroness, he still reaffirms the well-worn misogynist stereotype – familiar from Tertullian onwards – of women's vanity about their appearance.⁴⁵ It is true that both Petrarch and Boccaccio are critical of contemporary *men* in their catalogues – whose function is, after all, to reprove the lax morals of the present day and to lament the loss of the greater virtue of the past. However, in the *De Viris* and the *De Casibus* men are attacked as part of a complaint about a *general* decline in standards of conduct. Such criticisms are therefore very different from those which Boccaccio makes against women in the *De Mulieribus*, where he castigates the female sex for its failure to be more like the male sex.⁴⁶

In the preface to the *De Mulieribus*, Boccaccio claims both authority and originality for his work. He inserts himself into the authoritative genealogy of historians writing in the genre of the biographical catalogue, thus allying himself both with the authors of Antiquity and with Petrarch (*De Mulieribus*, 22). He also declares himself to be the first to have written such a text about *women*, thereby rescuing them from historical oblivion (*ibid.*, 24).⁴⁷ However, whilst appearing to celebrate women in the same manner as Petrarch feted men, Boccaccio introduces a slightly different set of criteria since not all the women in his text have been chosen for their glorious deeds. Rather, some have been included because of their extraordinary characters or the spectacular nature of their rise and fall at the hands of Fortune, this last criterion having been, as we have seen, specifically rejected by Petrarch: 'eisque addere ex multis quasdam, quas aut audacia seu vires ingenii et industria, aut nature munus, vel fortune gratia, seu iniuria, notabiles fecit' (*ibid.*, 24) ([I have added] to them some of the many women whom daring, intellectual power, perseverance, natural endowments, or Fortune's favour or enmity have made noteworthy, *Famous Women*, xxxvii). Boccaccio also appears to follow Petrarch, at least in the later

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 50–8.

⁴⁶ On a similar distinction in the sermons of medieval preachers between castigating men as an estate or as humans and women for being female, see Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Gendered sin and misogyny in John of Bromyard's "Summa Predicantium"', *Traditio* 47 (1992), 233–57.

⁴⁷ On Plutarch's *Mulierum Virtutes*, an important classical catalogue devoted entirely to women, whose existence Boccaccio does not acknowledge, see McLeod, *Virtue*, 19–22.

versions of the *De Viris*, in refusing to mix pagan and Judaeo-Christian examples on the grounds that their motivations and aims were different, the former seeking earthly glory and the latter eternal salvation. A further reason for the omission of Judaeo-Christian women from the *De Mulieribus* is that it increases the author's originality, since their deeds had already been commemorated in biblical and hagiographical texts (ibid., 28).

For both Petrarch and Boccaccio, the purpose of their prefatory remarks is to establish their authority as writers within the catalogue tradition and to explain to their implied readers whether they should aim to follow or to shun the examples provided by the stories in their texts. Neither writer appears to express any 'anxiety of influence'⁴⁸ in seeking to construct for himself an authority as great as that of his illustrious antecedents within the catalogue genre. For Christine, however, things are not so straightforward. Unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio's texts, Christine's *Cité* has neither a dedication nor an authorial preface. Instead, it has a much more extensive prologue in which she reveals her 'anxiety of authorship' in taking up a pen in the first place, given that she has no previous examples of women writers on whose literary authority she can draw.⁴⁹ Moreover, in contrast to her two male predecessors who act purely as authorial and narratorial figures in their prefaces, Christine introduces into her prologue the narrative frame of a dream-vision. This framing device is superficially similar to that which Boccaccio employs in the body of the *De Casibus* where he is visited by Fortune and embarks on a journey to meet souls in torment, but it has a wholly different function in terms of establishing her authority and her relationship with her readers. In Christine's dream-vision, she herself features *in propria persona* as a protagonist in her own text when comforted by the three allegorical figures of Raison, Droiture and Justice following her distress at reading about the alleged wickedness of women in misogynist books such as Matheolus' *Lamentations*. Through the use of this fiction, Christine represents herself in the *Cité* as a receiver rather than as a dispenser of wisdom, thereby appearing to place herself on the same level as her implied readers. But why did Christine choose to open her text in this way? How does her choice

⁴⁸ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴⁹ For the use of this term to describe women's difficulty in inserting themselves into a literary genealogy, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).

of rhetorical strategies in the prologue affect her authority as an author, and the role of the reader, in the *Cité*?

In contrast to Petrarch and Boccaccio, Christine's bid for literary authority is based not simply on inserting her text into the pre-existing catalogue genre but also on attacking the anti-feminist tradition. Her prologue both undermines the authority of misogyny, expressed as a metaphor of clearing the ground of any 'ordes pierres broçonneuses et noires' in order to lay the foundations of the City of Ladies (643), and proposes an alternative to it, that provided by theology. This recourse to theology has two important implications for Christine: first, it offers her a new female model of authority for herself as author, that of the Virgin Mary in the Annunciation; secondly, it supplies her with a series of theological proofs by which to structure her defence of women throughout the *Cité*.

Misogyny is presented in the *Cité* as an all-pervasive doctrine, since Christine the protagonist complains of being unable to open any book without immediately coming across some derogatory remark about the female sex: 'generaument aucques en tous traittiez philosophes, pouettes, tous orateurs desquelz les noms seroit longue chose, semble que tous parlent par une meismes bouche et tous accordent une semblable conclusion, determinant les meurs femennins enclins et plains de tous les vices' (618). In fact, Christine's complaint is somewhat hyperbolic, as defences of women such as the *Livre de Leesse* written by Jehan le Fèvre, Matheolus' own translator into French,⁵⁰ or the French versions of the story of Melibeus and Prudence taken from Albertano of Brescia's *Book of Consolation and Advice*, would have been available to her.⁵¹ However, by choosing not to mention these texts and by emphasising instead her difficulties in

⁵⁰ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 278. However, for studies of Jehan le Fèvre's text which suggests that his defence of women might in fact be ironic, see Karen Pratt, 'Analogy or logic; authority or experience? Rhetorical strategies for and against women', in Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, eds., *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture. Selected Proceedings from the Seventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 27 July-1 August 1992* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 57-66; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Jean Le Fèvre's *Livre de Leesse*: praise or blame of women?', *Speculum* 69 (1994), 707-27; Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 131-50.

⁵¹ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 237-42. As Curnow, *Cité*, vol. 1, 408, points out, a copy of the French version of Albertano's text, entitled the *Livre de Mellibee et de dame Prudence sa femme*, is bound in one of the manuscripts which contains the *Cité*: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 9235. Indeed, it was once thought that Christine herself had translated this text: see Charity Cannon Willard, 'The manuscript tradition of the *Livre des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's audience', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27,3 (1966), 433-44.

opposing such an overwhelming mass of negative opinions, Christine thereby stresses the novelty of her approach. The basis of misogynist teaching, as she has gleaned from her reading of Matheolus, is that woman is a 'monstre en nature' (620), a defective creature who is somehow less than human.⁵² This view, though presented as being propounded by philosophers and poets, nevertheless has important *theological* repercussions for Christine since she is forced to contemplate the almost unthinkable idea that in creating woman, God deliberately created something vile:

Ha! Dieux, comment puet cecy estre? Car *se je ne erre en la foye*, je ne doy mye doubter que ton inffinnie sapience et tres parfaite bonté ait riens fait que tout ne soit bon? Ne fourmas tu toy meismes tres singulierement femme, et des lors luy donnas toutes telles inclinacions qu'il te plaisoit qu'elle eust? Et comment pourroit ce estre que tu y eusses en riens failly? (620, emphasis added)

As Christine herself indicates, this conclusion constitutes theological error and so places her soul in a perilous position since it explicitly contradicts Genesis 1:31: 'And God saw every thing he had made, and behold, it was very good.' By implication, those misogynist writers who seek to convince her of this argument are guilty of the same error.

In order to correct Christine's misconceptions, Raison sets out to destroy the credibility of the teachings of misogyny and the authority of its exponents. She shows how anti-feminism is not an unassailable doctrine but one which can be refuted by further argument, using the image of gold being refined in a furnace to describe the need to continue the debate on women's worth (623). This image of the furnace functions in two different ways: on the one hand, it ironically subverts Matheolus' description in the *Lamentations* of marriage as a purgatorial fire,⁵³ whilst on the other, it prefigures Christine's later

⁵² This Aristotelian view is discussed and ultimately refuted by Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, xiii: see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 92–3.

⁵³ Afin que par la forte luite
Qu'en mariage est introduite
L'omme se puist justifier
Et par preuve saintifier,
Aussi com l'or dedens la forge,
Qui est recuit quant on le forge,

(*Lamentations*, vol. 1, Book III, lines 1943–8).

See also *Cité*, 1039, for the note to this reference in para. 4.

stories of the sufferings of female saints in Book III by creating a forceful parallel between the situation of women under attack from misogynists and the virgin martyrs at the mercy of their pagan torturers.⁵⁴ Raison thus casts doubt on the validity of anti-feminist thinking by equating it with the heresy of unbelievers, a point which she reiterates more explicitly later in the prologue: 'Et les simples debonnaies dames, a l'exemple de patience que Dieu commande, ont souffert amyablement les grans injures qui, tant par bouche de plusieurs comme par mains escrips, leur ont esté faites *a tort et a pechié*, eulx rapportant a Dieu de leur bon droit' (629, emphasis added).

Raison argues that far from being all-pervasive, as Christine had initially believed, misogyny is in fact a marginal discourse with regard to Christian doctrine, although it is no less dangerous for that since, at its extreme limits, it borders on error and even heresy.⁵⁵ She sets up a hierarchy of discourses in order to point out that philosophical authorities are not necessarily immune from error, since Plato was corrected by Aristotle, who was himself in turn corrected by St Augustine (623). By substituting theological authority for that of pagan philosophers, Raison proposes to correct the teachings of misogyny from which Christine has derived her erroneous conclusions about the female sex. At first sight, this is a somewhat surprising argument given the important place of both scriptural and patristic sayings in the canon of anti-feminist writings alongside those of Aristotle or Ovid. However, as Graham Gould has argued, patristic thought on the question of women was by no means homogeneous: though to the modern reader the Church Fathers might often appear misogynist when they criticise women, such criticisms are often placed next to pro-female statements.⁵⁶ Whilst this juxtaposition may seem contradictory, in fact both sets of

⁵⁴ See McLeod, *Virtue*, 134; and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "'Femme de corps et femme par sens": Christine de Pizan's saintly women', *Romanic Review* 87,2 (1996), 157–75. Actual examples of virgins tortured in furnaces in the *Cité* include St Martina (989), St Eufemia (995–6), St Christine (1007), and St Afra (1026).

⁵⁵ On Christine's marginalisation of misogyny, see Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan and the question of feminist rhetoric', *Teaching Language through Literature* 22 (1983), 15–24; McLeod, *Virtue*, 116; McLeod and Katharina M. Wilson, 'A clerk in name alone – a clerk in all but name: the misogynous tradition and *La Cité des Dames*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 67–76.

⁵⁶ Graham Gould, 'Women in the writings of the Fathers: language, belief and reality', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Women in the Church*, Studies in Church History, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1–14.

views could happily co-exist in the same author, depending on whether his moral aim was to praise virgins and chaste wives or to castigate profligate and garrulous termagants.⁵⁷ As we shall see, for Christine the Fathers are clearly enrolled on the side of the defence of women against the pagan philosophers.

Raison makes a similar appeal to theological arguments in her attacks on medieval poets such as Matheolus and Jean de Meung, whose authority, she claims, is based on much weaker foundations than that of the philosophers. Indeed, in the case of Matheolus, his ideas, when read literally, could be seen to be heretical, particularly against 'l'ordre de mariage qui est saint estat digne et de Dieu ordonné' (624).⁵⁸ By encouraging men to avoid marriage because of the vileness of women, such poets were harnessing misogyny to the teaching of misogamy.⁵⁹ In fact, Raison's condemnation of such arguments as heretical is itself polemical, given that misogamy as a doctrine was also founded in large part on the authority of the Church Fathers, in particular St Jerome.⁶⁰

Advising Christine of the need to pit theological authority against philosophical and poetic pseudo-authority, Raison appropriates for Christine's defence of women the literary tools which misogynist writers had traditionally used against them.⁶¹ Although in the 'querelle' Christine had decried Pierre Col for quoting selectively

⁵⁷ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 12–13.

⁵⁸ Matheolus also makes at least two other highly contentious points about women which go against orthodox Christianity. First, he claims that Christ announced his resurrection to women because of their inability to stop babbling and, by extension, to keep a secret: 'Les femmes visita premieres; / Car de jangler sont coustumieres' (*Lamentations*, vol. 1, Book II, lines 2321–2). Secondly, and more importantly, he explicitly contradicts Augustinian doctrine in stating that woman will not be saved at the Last Judgment, and will therefore have to give man back his missing rib:

Mais, sa coste restituée,
Femme sera destituée.
Ainsi saulvée ne sera
Ne ja ne ressuscitera.

(ibid., vol. 1, Book III, lines 1449–52)

This last argument is so obviously extreme that it is probably meant to be read ironically as a symptom of the bigamous narrator's ravings. Whether this means that the whole of the text should be read in this way is another matter: see Pratt, 'Analogy or logic'.

⁵⁹ See Katharina M. Wilson, and Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

⁶⁰ Ibid. In fact, Jerome's text *Against Jovinian* (c.393), which, because of its extensive quotation from Theophrastus' *Book on Marriage* became the misogynous text *par excellence* for medieval writers, was deemed excessive in its own time. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 64.

⁶¹ Bloch, 'Medieval misogyny'; and Quilligan, *Allegory*, 61.

from the *Rose* in order to reinforce his defence of Jean de Meung's morality, as a woman reader of misogynist texts in the *Cité* she cites the pro-female arguments from her patristic sources and ignores the anti-female ones which misogynists had traditionally exploited.⁶² Moreover, as Raison encourages her to do, Christine reads more mixed arguments against the grain, in accordance with the rhetorical device of *antiphrasis*,⁶³ extracting from them only what is useful for her thesis: 'Si te conseille que tu faces ton prouffit de leurs diz et que tu l'entendes ainsi, quel que fust leur entente, es lieux ou ilz blasment les femmes' (624).

Raison's final argument against the authority of misogyny equates women's assailants with the image of obdurate, unbelieving torturers. She claims that even though such attacks on the female sex are pernicious and painful for women to read, they in fact harm the slanderer more than the slandered. If misogyny is heresy, its practitioners are running the risk of damning themselves: 'car saiches que tout mal dit si generaument des femmes empire les diseurs et non pas elles meismes' (625). The danger which misogyny represents is ultimately directed against its own exponents, as Christine had also demonstrated in the 'querelle' by arguing that the *Rose*'s defenders had been 'infected' by its poisonous teachings.

The prologue to the *Cité* not only establishes Christian doctrine as the criterion by which Christine can undermine the credibility of misogynist writers, it also uses theology in order to provide her with a model for her own authority in the text. Critics have frequently commented on Christine's appropriation of the authority of both Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*⁶⁴ and Dante's *Divina Commedia*⁶⁵ for the structure of the *Cité*: here Raison, Droiture and Justice perform a similar function to that of Philosophy in Boethius' text, whereas Christine's role as their disciple echoes that of Dante under Virgil's

⁶² Blamires, *The Case for Women*.

⁶³ Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold', 90; and Quilligan, *Allegory*, 65.

⁶⁴ See Glynnis M. Cropp, 'Boèce et Christine de Pizan', *Le Moyen Age* 87 (1981), 387–417; Blanchard, 'Artéfact littéraire', 7–47.

⁶⁵ See Y. Batard, 'Dante et Christine de Pisan (1364–1430)', in *Missions et démarches de la critique: mélanges offerts au Professeur J. A. Vier*, Publications de l'Université de Haute Bretagne (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), 345–51; Earl Jeffrey Richards, 'Christine de Pizan and Dante: a re-examination', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 222 (1985), 100–11; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Christine de Pizan and the misogynistic tradition', *Romanic Review* 81,3 (1991), 279–92; Quilligan, *Allegory*, 18–31; McLeod, *Virtue*, 117; and Slerca, 'Dante'.

instruction in the *Divina Commedia*.⁶⁶ However, in the absence of an anti-misogynist tradition with which to combat male slander of women, Christine's catalogue also invokes the New Testament account of a key female figure whose authority in fact buttresses that of the *Cité* at several different levels: the Virgin Mary. The parallels between Christine's visitation by the three Virtues and the Annunciation of the Virgin are striking and more persistently sustained throughout the prologue of the *Cité* than any allusion to either the *Consolation of Philosophy* or the *Divina Commedia*.⁶⁷

First, both Mary in St Luke's account of the Annunciation and Christine in the *Cité* are presented as intimidated by the sudden appearance of the bearers of the prophecies which will concern them. Mary's initial reaction at the angel's appearance is one of fear: 'And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be' (Luke 1:29). Christine is similarly frightened by the supernatural vision of her noble visitors, for she mistakes them for devils: 'Doubtant que ce fust aucune fantosme pour me tempter, fis en mon front le signe de la croix' (622). Secondly, both are then reassured by being told that they are privileged to be entrusted with the task that awaits them. Gabriel twice emphasises to Mary the fact that she is the honoured recipient of God's prophecy: 'Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women' (Luke 1:28); 'Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God' (Luke 1:30). Likewise, Raison twice informs Christine that she alone among women has proved herself worthy of receiving their prophetic utterances: 'tu as desservy, et dessers, estre de nous, comme chiere amie, visitee et conssolee' (628); 'Ainsi, belle fille, t'est [donné] la prerogative entre les femmes de faire et bastir la Cité des Dames' (630). Thirdly, both Mary and Christine are informed that the product of their missions will be immortal. The child which Mary will conceive is destined to rule forever: 'And he shall rule over the

⁶⁶ On Christine's identification with Boethius in the *Avision* see Semple, 'Consolation', 39–48; and with Dante in the *Chemin de long estude*, see Dina De Rentiis, "'Sequere me'": 'Imitatio' dans la *Divine Comédie* et dans le *Livre du Chemin de long estude*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 31–42.

⁶⁷ See Quilligan, *Allegory*, 54–5, 238–9; V. A. Kolve, 'The Annunciation to Christine: authorial empowerment in the *Book of the City of Ladies*', in Brendan Cassidy, ed., *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 23–24 March 1990* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 171–96; Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Fondements et fondations de l'écriture chez Christine de Pizan: scènes de lectures et scènes d'incarnation', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 79–96.

house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:33). The fruit of Christine's labours, the city, will never be destroyed as it is superior to all earthly cities: 'Si sera ta cité tres belle sans pareille et de perpetuelle duree au monde' (630). Finally, both women submit themselves in humility to God's wishes, Christine's words being an almost verbatim quotation of those of the Virgin. Mary states: "'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'" (Luke 1:38), whilst Christine echoes: 'Et voycy vostre chamberiere preste d'obeir. Or commandez, je obeyray, et soit fait de moy selonc voz parolles' (639).

These textual parallels are further underscored in the iconographical detail of the miniatures in the *Cité*.⁶⁸ In the manuscripts of the text produced under Christine's supervision,⁶⁹ her gown is always blue, a colour signifying truth, as is the Virgin's in most late medieval representations of the Annunciation and, indeed, in the miniature which opens the third part of the *Cité* in which Mary is elected Queen of the City.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Mary is frequently depicted alone in a room of her house, an open book containing Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth in front of her (Isaiah 7:14), just as Christine is represented reading books in her study in the opening miniature of the *Cité*.⁷¹ She thus boldly appropriates for herself the authority of the Virgin as the humble yet elected receiver of a prophecy sent by God's messengers.

Christine's recourse to theology provides her not only with a

⁶⁸ The manuscripts bearing the three miniatures which precede each of the three parts of the text are Paris, BN f. fr. 607, London, BL Harley 4431, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 9393, and Paris, BN f. fr. 1178. One manuscript, Paris, BN f. fr. 1179, only has the first miniature. For a discussion of the manuscript tradition of the text, see *Cité*, vol. 1, 346–589.

⁶⁹ Kolve, 'The Annunciation', mentions neither of these iconographical parallels in his analysis of the *Cité* miniatures. As he bases his discussion on BN f. fr. 1177, a manuscript which was produced under circumstances over which Christine had no direct control, the iconographical elements which he identifies as alluding to the Annunciation are the representation of the three Virtues as a Trinity, and the miraculous ray of light falling onto Christine's lap; this latter element is lacking in the manuscripts for which she *was* directly responsible.

⁷⁰ See D. M. Robb, 'The iconography of the Annunciation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *Art Bulletin* 18 (1936), 480–526; Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), 33–52; George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 151.

⁷¹ This representation of the Virgin reading became the standard in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: see Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), second edition, 191. See also Diana M. Webb, 'Woman and home: the domestic setting of late medieval spirituality', in Sheils and Wood, *Women in the Church*, 159–74.

model for her own authority in the prologue of the *Cité*, but also with a set of arguments with which to combat misogyny, arguments which she uses to structure the whole of the *Cité*, whether discussing pagan or Christian women.⁷² Despite the highly conventional nature of this theological defence,⁷³ the originality of Christine's text resides in its attempt to employ such arguments in the generic context of a catalogue of virtuous *exempla*. As Raison stresses to Christine, misogynist slanderers have transgressed God's laws in choosing to attack women, since they have acted both against reason and nature:

Contre raison en tant que il est tres ingrat et mal congnoissant des grans biens que femme luy a faiz, si grans que il ne pourroit rendre, et par tant de foiz, et continuellement a neccessité que elle luy face. Contre nature en ce que il n'est beste mue quelconques ne oysel qui naturellement n'aime chierement son per: c'est la femelle. Sy est bien chose desnaturee quant homme raisonnable fait au contraire. (646)

Far from women being less than human, Raison insists that it is misogynists who deviate from nature when they persist in acting against God's will and fail to acknowledge or to be grateful for women's contribution to society.⁷⁴ The *Cité* here transposes into the domain of gender the theme of *gratitudo*, which by the fourteenth century had become an important concept with which medieval social theorists expressed the need to show loyalty towards one's benefactors in return for their gifts, thus assuring maximum social cohesion through ties of loyalty and inter-dependence.⁷⁵ By invoking

⁷² On Christine's and Abelard's use of theological proofs to argue for the dignity of women, see Leslie C. Brook, 'Christine de Pisan, Heloise, and Abelard's holy women', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 109,5/6 (1993), 556–63.

⁷³ See Paul Meyer, 'Mélanges de poésie française, IV: Plaidoyer en faveur des femmes', *Romania* 6 (1877), 499–503; and Meyer, 'Les manuscrits français de Cambridge, II: Bibliothèque de l'Université', *Romania* 15 (1886), 236–357; *Cité*, 1050; and Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6–27.

⁷⁴ *Le Bien des fames*, lines 44–7, similarly stresses the potentially heretical nature of misogyny:

Je ne sai clerc, ne lai, ne prestre
Que de fame puist consirrer,
Se il ne veut trop meserrer
Envers Dieu en mainte maniere.

⁷⁵ See Andrew Galloway, 'The making of a social ethic in late-medieval England: from *gratitudo* to "kyndenesse"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55,3 (1994), 365–83. See also Alain Chartier, *Le Quadrilogue invectif*, ed. E. Droz (Paris: Champion, 1950), 2, who castigates his compatriots for their failure to maintain the state in good health: 'l'ingratitude des dons de Dieu est punie sur les hommes par sustraction de sa grace que après bon amendement et loiale correction a renvoyé et redrecié les seigneuries et les peuples en parfaite paix et restitution de leur disposicion premiere'.

the concept of gratitude, Raison argues that misogynists are both going against God's own Providence and undermining good relations between men and women by acting ungratefully towards a sex whose actions have contributed positively to the general development of civilisation.

Her two principal arguments in defence of the female sex, both of which are reinforced by theological proofs, are first, that woman has brought great benefits to humanity, and secondly, that woman is man's 'per', his natural and worthy companion who shares his human essence, as Christine herself had insisted in the 'querelle'. The greatest benefit of all to humanity, Raison argues, has been that of the Virgin's conception of Jesus (652). This act not only compensates for the Fall brought about by Eve, but far exceeds it in terms of its significance for the human race: 'trop plus hault degré a acquis par Marie qu'il ne perdi par Eve, quant humanité est conjointe a deité' (653).⁷⁶ The Virgin's pre-eminence is proven by the *ex exaltatione* topos which declares her to be 'par dessus tous les anges' (652).⁷⁷ Whilst the Virgin is the apex of this proof, the *Cité* also draws on numerous other examples to illustrate the benefits that women have brought to humankind.⁷⁸ Raison cites a Latin proverb, 'fallere, flere, nere, statuit deus in muliere' ('God made woman to lie, cry, and spin') often used to disparage women,⁷⁹ but turns it round to stress the good that has come to humanity from women's ability to 'plourer, parler, filler' (657). Firstly, reading antiphrastically in order to counter the misogynist view that women use tears to deceive men,⁸⁰ she shows the value of women's tears as a sign of faith by which unbelievers are converted, of which those of the Magdalene

⁷⁶ See Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 23.

⁷⁷ A similar argument is employed in *Le Bien des fames*, lines 11–17.

⁷⁸ Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 23, notes that the Virgin, though the embodiment of traditional female virtues such as humility and obedience, is in fact a problematic example for women because of her unique status as virgin mother. However, as Eamon Duffy argues in 'Holy maidens, holy wyfes: the cult of women saints in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England', in Sheils and Wood, *Women and the Church*, 175–96, 189–90, such examples of virginity as Mary provided 'not so much a model to imitate . . . but rather a source of power to be tapped . . . as uniquely powerful intercessors'.

⁷⁹ For the use of this adage in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, line 402, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 210, and 294, n. 46.

⁸⁰ For this negative account of women's tears in Juvenal, see *ibid.*, 28:

She fakes the outraged sigh, and hates the boys whom her husband
Has, or she says he has, or sheds tears over a mistress
Purely fictitious, of course. Her tears come down like raindrops,
With plenty more where they came from, ready to flow at her bidding.

(*Satire Six*, lines 272–5)

(658) and St Augustine's mother (659) are the most famous examples. This reference to conversion anticipates the deeds of the virgin martyrs set out by Christine in Book III. Secondly, in a crucial argument which will be discussed in greater detail below, Raison also valorises female speech, in order to refute a crucial element of misogynist doctrine.⁸¹ She highlights the usefulness of women's language and the many virtuous purposes to which it has been put: 'Dieux a demonstré que voirement a yl mis langagige [sic] en femme pour en estre servy' (663). Raison also combats the standard misogynist arguments against women's sophistry and garrulity, by citing the *ex apparitione* topos according to which Christ chose women to spread word of his resurrection by appearing first to the Magdalene (660).⁸² Finally, by praising women for spinning, Raison anticipates the discussion of the inventions and discoveries of the pagan women in Book I of the *Cité*. She stresses the universally useful nature of this art: 'sans le quel ouvrage les offices du monde seroyent maintenus en grant ordure' (663).⁸³

Raison similarly uses conventional theological proofs when she argues that as man's 'per', woman enjoys a full humanity and is not, as misogynists would have Christine believe, a less-than-human 'other'. She refutes the Aristotelian view of women's defective bodies propounded by texts like the *Du secret des femmes* (a work wrongly attributed in the later Middle Ages to Albertus Magnus),⁸⁴ citing two well-known theological topos: first, the *e loco* topos which argues that Eve was born in a nobler place than Adam, since she was formed in paradise and he outside; and second, the *e materia* topos which stresses the nobility of the matter from which she was born, a rib,

⁸¹ Women's speech is castigated in misogynist thought because of its association with temptation and seduction in the Fall: see Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 15; and Edith Joyce Benkov, 'Language and women: from silence to speech', in Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney, eds., *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Syracuse University Press, 1989), 245–65. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 51, for this view expressed by Tertullian: 'You are the gateway of the devil; you are the one who unseals the curse of that tree, and you are the first one to turn your back on the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not capable of corrupting' (*The Appearance of Women*, 1.1, emphasis added).

⁸² For other examples of this argument in women's defence cited by Abelard, *Letter 6*, 'On the origin of nuns', and Albertano of Brescia, *The Book of Consolation and Advice*, ch. 4, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 233–4 and 239 respectively.

⁸³ For other examples of praise for women's spinning, cited by Marbod of Rennes, *The Book of the Good Woman*, from *The Book with Ten Chapters*, ch. 4, see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 230; and *Le Bien des fames*, lines 83–9.

⁸⁴ *Cité*, 1048, note to para. 27.

rather than from earth (646–51).⁸⁵ Furthermore, Raison shows how the 'rib-topos' serves to symbolise woman's role in marriage as man's companion and not his slave, since Eve was created from Adam's side and not at his feet (651), a commonly used argument which prefigures the praise of wives conducted in Book II.⁸⁶ On the question of the soul Raison is equally adamant, stating unequivocally that woman as well as man was formed in God's image, in terms of His 'esperit intellectuel': 'Laquelle ame Dieu crea et mist aussi bonne, aussi noble et toute pareille en corps femenin comme ou masculin' (652).⁸⁷ This proof underscores not only the discussion of the intellectual qualities of women in Book I, but also the examples of the martyrs in Book III, who are shown to be of equal faith to men.

However, once she has stressed the common humanity of male and female, Raison also asserts their mutual complementarity in terms of a sexual division of labour, a point which has posed problems for many modern commentators of the *Cité*.⁸⁸ In answer to Christine's question about women's exclusion from courts of justice, Raison explains that male and female have complementary functions for which God has fitted them, an explanation which may be derived from Aristotle's *Economics* where he stresses the need for men and women to play different roles in order to assure the smooth running of human society:⁸⁹ 'Dieux a establi homme et femme pour le servir en divers offices et pour aussi aidier et conforter l'un et l'autre, chascun en ce qui luy est establi a faire, et a chascun sexe a donné tel

⁸⁵ See Meyer, 'Mélanges', and Meyer, 'Les manuscrits français'; *Cité*, 1050, note to para. 27a; and Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 91.

⁸⁶ See D. L. d'Avray and M. Tausche, 'Marriage sermons in *ad status* collections of the central Middle Ages', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 47 (1980), 71–119. For an example of this topos cited in defence of women, see *Dives and Pauper*, Commandment 1, ch. 4, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 261.

⁸⁷ See Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 13; Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981); Lyndon Reynolds, 'Bonaventure on gender and godlikeness', *Downside Review* 106 (1988), 171–94; and Børresen, ed., *Image of God and Gender Models* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1991).

⁸⁸ See, for example, Quilligan, *Allegory*, 66–7; and Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 295, n. 50.

⁸⁹ See Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, trans. E. S. Forster, in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), revised edition, Book I, 3: 'Thus the nature both of the man and of the woman has been preordained by the will of heaven to live a common life. For they are distinguished in that the powers which they possess are not applicable to purposes in all cases identical, but in some respects their functions are opposed to one another though they all tend to the same end. For nature has made the one sex stronger, the other weaker.'

nature et inclinacion comme a faire son office luy appartient et compete' (665). It is men who uphold the law because they have the physical strength to do so, not because women are lacking in any mental capacity or in courage (664–6).⁹⁰ This concept of a sex-specific division of labour is fundamental to the type of defence of women offered throughout the *Cité*, one in which Christine seeks to convince misogynists of women's intellectual and moral potential for exercising virtue rather than to propose the reform of society so as to grant women equal access to all social roles. It therefore allows her to encourage women to pursue personal virtue within their existing social conditions, a lesson which she will propound more directly in the *Trois Vertus*.

If the prologue of the *Cité* establishes the theological basis of both Christine's authority and of the pro-women arguments which she puts forward as an alternative to those asserted by misogynists, her self-representation here as protagonist also determines the role she expects her reader to play in her text. Unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio, whose aim is largely to act as figures who recount *exempla* for their readers' edification in a detached authorial voice, Christine functions as a model for her female readers in order to encourage them to pursue virtue and to refute misogynist slander by their own worthy actions.

The lessons which the *Cité* offers its readers are designed to address two distinct needs on their part, both of which are also felt by Christine the protagonist herself.⁹¹ On the one hand, she reveals to her readers the type of process which they must undergo in reading the *Cité* by first going through this process herself. Whereas in the 'querelle', Christine had argued that misogynist texts such as the *Rose* can have a dangerous effect on their male readers by encouraging them to adopt immoral attitudes towards both women and marriage, the prologue of the *Cité* shows the effects which misogyny can produce even on a female reader, in this case Christine herself. Schibanoff has described these effects as the result of 'immasculation', whereby Christine, through adopting the anti-feminist point of view, succumbs to feelings of 'self-hatred and self-doubt' as a woman, feelings which, as we have seen above, are presented in the prologue as being tantamount to theological

⁹⁰ McLeod, *Virtue*, 124.

⁹¹ See Laura Kathryn McRae, 'Interpretation and the acts of reading and writing in Christine de Pisan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *Romanic Review* 82,4 (1991), 412–33.

error.⁹² In order for Christine to free herself from the deleterious effects of reading such texts, she must first learn to reject misogynist opinions. The three Virtues therefore have to teach Christine, and by extension her female readers, using *anamnesis* or recollection, a Platonic doctrine which Philosophy employs with her disciple Boethius to help him recall the knowledge he once had but has forgotten.⁹³ In Book II of the *Cité*, for example, Droiture refers to the need to correct misogynists' faulty memories: 'Et qui veulst oublier les grans biens que font les meres a leurs fiz et femmes a tous hommes? A tout le moins, je leur pry que les biens qui touchent dons espirituelz ilz ne vueillent pas oublier' (856). Through many other persistent reminders, the *Cité* serves to reactivate the memory of those readers who, like Christine, have internalised misogynist teachings by revealing how they have unjustly forgotten women's contribution to society.⁹⁴ This emphasis on faulty memory suggests that misogynists have acted unethically, since, as Mary Carruthers has argued: 'The choice to train one's memory or not, for the ancients and medievals, was not a choice dictated by convenience: it was a matter of ethics. A person without a memory, if such a thing could be, would be a person without moral character and, in a basic sense, without humanity.'⁹⁵

On the other hand, Christine acts as a model for her female reader by showing her how to emulate the virtue of the women whose stories are recounted in her text, in line with the Petrarchan ideal of an *imitatio*. Unlike Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus*, whose recommendation that his female reader should follow his examples is made highly problematic by his equation of virtue with manliness, Christine here shows her female reader the way to honour by herself performing an important virtuous action: the construction of the

⁹² Schibanoff, 'Taking the gold', 85–6, borrows the term 'immasculation', defined as the process by which a woman is forced to read as a man, from Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

⁹³ See Margaret Brabant and Michael Brint, 'Identity and difference in Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*' in Brabant, *Politics*, 207–22. The doctrine of *anamnesis* is discussed in *Phaedo* 72e–77d and *Meno* 81d–e in *Plato*, 12 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1928), and Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 22 and 109, n. 14.

⁹⁴ See also Jody Enders, 'The feminist mnemonics of Christine de Pizan', *Modern Language Quarterly* 55,3 (1994), 231–49.

⁹⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13.

'city'.⁹⁶ In Book II, Droiture explicitly stresses the praiseworthiness of this action by comparing Christine's writing of the text with the good deeds of women who employed their virtue in other ways: 'ceste oeuvre a bastir estoit a toy reservé et nom mie a elles, car par leurs oeuvres estoient assez les femmes louees aux gens de bon entendement' (924). Whilst Christine writes the work which contains innumerable examples of women's noble actions, her female readers can choose to copy her lead and so 'write' themselves, metaphorically, into the *Cité*.

Christine's prologue thus sets out the foundations of the argument to be developed in the three books of the *Cité*: woman's common humanity with man in mental, moral and spiritual terms, a humanity which equips her for her role as man's helpmeet and the necessary complement to his role in society. Like its title, the prologue of the *Cité* clearly contrasts Christine's text with the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Whereas they speak as already established authorities within the catalogue genre, Christine appropriates for herself the authority of a God-sent prophecy, thereby placing her catalogue under the sign of theology. Moreover, unlike Petrarch and Boccaccio, whose relationship with previous historiographical authorities was unambiguous, consisting largely of paying homage to and selecting from their predecessors' writings, Christine explicitly hierarchises her sources, pitting theology against philosophy and poetry in order to construct the basis of her defence of women. Finally, Christine speaks not as an external authorial voice by which to admonish her contemporaries as Petrarch and Boccaccio do, but rather as a model working from within her text for her female reader who must be brought back from the brink of theological error.

PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY: PROGRESS VERSUS DECLINE

Having shown how the title and prefatory parts of these works by Petrarch, Boccaccio and Christine establish both their authors' status and the role of their implied readers, we need now to examine the conception of history contained in each text. This issue is a crucial one as it determines how each of our three authors chose the

⁹⁶ The prologue of the *Cité* can be seen to correspond to the Ciceronian *exordium*, whose function is to convince the reader of the protagonist's virtue: see McLeod, *Virtue*, 122.

biographical examples that they offered for their readers' emulation or disapprobation. As we shall see, the most striking divergence between Christine and her predecessors is that whereas Petrarch and Boccaccio share a pessimistic view of history, which they regard either as a process of decline or as a continuum of vice down the ages,⁹⁷ she argues that history has been marked by progress and that women have played a key role in the development of civilisation.

In the preface to the *De Viris*, as in his other historical works, Petrarch presents a clear picture of the decadence and decline of his compatriots.⁹⁸ As Franco Simone has argued, Petrarch saw his own era as constituting the lowest point of the rotation of Fortune's Wheel, whose apogee had been reached in Roman times.⁹⁹ However, Petrarch's belief in a fundamentally unchanging human nature led him to adhere to a cyclical conception of history in which a return to a heroic past *would* be possible.¹⁰⁰ He maintained that by informing his readers of the glorious deeds of the Romans, he could inculcate in them a desire to imitate the Ancients and to turn back the Wheel of Fortune towards apogee and a new Roman Age.¹⁰¹ This conception of history explains why Petrarch ultimately decided only to include Roman heroes in his text rather than also adding the great men of the Old Testament, such as Adam and Nimrod. Although the aspirations which motivated these latter characters would have been more familiar to the medieval reader (for they could be read as prefigurations of the New Testament),¹⁰² their moral aims were nevertheless fundamentally irreconcilable with the civic and political aims of the Roman heroes. Through the use of virtuous examples, Petrarch sought to transmit to his reader the

⁹⁷ The view of decline is a medieval commonplace: see J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Growth and Origins* (New York: Dover Publications, 1932), 20–2; Theodor E. Mommsen, 'St. Augustine and the Christian idea of progress: the background of the *City of God*', in his *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Eugene F. Rice Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 265–89.

⁹⁸ Mommsen, 'Petrarch's conception of the "Dark Ages"', in his *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 106–29.

⁹⁹ Franco Simone, 'Il Petrarca e la sua concezione ciclica della storia', *Arte e storia: studi in onore di Leonello Vincenti* (Turin: Giappichelli Editore, 1965), 382–428.

¹⁰⁰ Mommsen, 'Petrarch's conception', 127.

¹⁰¹ Simone, 'Il Petrarca'.

¹⁰² See Marcello Aurigemma, 'Petrarca e la storia: osservazioni sulle biografie del *De Viris Illustribus* da Adamo ad Ercole', *Scrittura e società: studi in onore di Gaetano Mariani* (Rome: Herder, 1985), 53–74; Eckhard Kessler, 'Petrarch's contribution to Renaissance historiography', *Res Publica Litterarum: Studies in the Classical Tradition* 1 (1978), 129–49.

respect and affection which he himself felt for the great heroes of the pagan past.¹⁰³

Boccaccio in the *De Casibus* is even more pessimistic than Petrarch about the moral state of his contemporaries and about the course of history as a whole. Adopting a linear, rather than cyclical, view of history, he argues that the vices of his own time are evidence not so much of a decline in morals but of a continuation of the immorality prevalent in Antiquity. To his mind, the downfall of the illustrious is ineluctable, in all periods of human history:

Et, ne in tempus aut sexum cadat obiectio, a mundi primordio in nostrum usque evum, consternatos duces illustresque alios, tam viros quam mulieres, passim disiectos, in medium succincte deducere mens est. (*De Casibus*, 10)

(And, so that there can be no accusation against any specific time or sex, my idea has been to present succinctly . . . those rulers and other famous persons, women as well as men, who have been cast down from the beginning of the world until now.) (*Illustrious Men*, 1–2, translation slightly amended)¹⁰⁴

Whilst Petrarch, in his attempt to encourage a return to the glories of Rome, advocates the need for the reader to imitate the Ancients, Boccaccio presents the reader with a catalogue of those unfortunate souls who have brought ruin upon themselves. The overall pattern of Boccaccio's narratives becomes explicit in the section where he recounts the fable of the fight between Poverty and Fortune, first told to him by his mentor, Andalò del Negro. According to this fable, Fortune, having been beaten by Poverty in hand-to-hand combat, was made to tie up her henchman Misfortune to a post so that only those who deliberately chose to untie him would suffer setbacks and tribulations (*De Casibus*, 192–200). Boccaccio's argument is that his readers' fate lies in their own hands: it is up to them to decide whether or not they should seek to emulate those souls whose overweening desire for glory led them into ruin. To emphasise this point, Boccaccio provides a lengthy series of *exempla* from Adam and Eve right up to the present, in order to stress the short time that is left to the reader until the fateful Day of Judgment.¹⁰⁵ Thus, rather

¹⁰³ Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio and the Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 11–20.

¹⁰⁴ Godman, 'Chaucer'.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Budra, 'The Mirror for Magistrates and the shape of *De Casibus* tragedy', *English Studies* 69,4 (1988), 303–12.

than providing his reader with virtuous models to follow, as Petrarch does, Boccaccio offers his reader examples of behaviour which should be shunned.

In the *De Mulieribus*, as in the *De Casibus*, Boccaccio adopts a linear chronology which runs from Eve, as first mother (though he largely omits Judaeo-Christian women), to Queen Joanna of Sicily, Boccaccio's contemporary to whom he had once considered dedicating the text (*De Mulieribus*, 18). This chronology reveals a general pattern of decline which explains the paucity of virtuous examples found in Boccaccio's own time, as he himself states in his Conclusion:

In nostras usque feminas, ut satis apparet, devenimus, quas inter adeo perrarus rutilantium numerus est, ut dare ceptis finem honestius credam quam, his ducentibus hodiernis, ad ulteriora progredi. (ibid., 448)

(As can be clearly seen, I have reached the women of our time, in which the number of illustrious ones is so small that I think it more suitable to come to an end here rather than proceed farther with the women of today.) (*Famous Women*, 251)

Yet in addition to suggesting that his female contemporaries are, in general, the inferiors of pagan women in terms of virtue, Boccaccio also argues that several of the pagan women he discusses were themselves actually *responsible* for the historical decline of the human condition. For example, in his discussion of the deeds of Queen Ceres, the inventor of agriculture, Boccaccio laments the loss of the Golden Age (*De Mulieribus*, 42–7), a point on which, as we shall see below, Christine explicitly disagrees with him. In this important passage of the text, Boccaccio strives to weigh up the good and the bad consequences of Ceres' inventions but finally, with reluctance, declares that he regrets the passing of these earlier, more innocent times:

Quibus inspectis, una cum innumeris aliis, vix scio, imo scio, quia longe aurea illa, licet rudia et agrestia fuerint, his nostris ferreis comptisque seculis preponenda sint. (ibid., 46)

(Having considered these things and others without number, I hardly know whether, or rather I do know that, those golden centuries, although primitive and uncivilized, were greatly to be preferred to our sophisticated age of iron.) (*Famous Women*, 13, translation slightly amended)

Far from praising Ceres for bringing new discoveries into the world, Boccaccio actually ends by blaming her for causing misery to the

human race.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, he condemns Veturia the Roman for her part in the process of historical decline (*De Mulieribus*, 218–27). He describes how, in thanks to Veturia for intervening with her son to save Rome, certain privileges, such as dressing in elaborate finery and inheriting wealth, were established for women, privileges which, to his mind, they have subsequently abused right up to the present day. Boccaccio castigates women, both of the past and the present, for their persistent profligacy and arrogance, and upbraids men for allowing themselves to be duped in this way:

Veturie igitur applaudant, eius colant nomen et meritum quotiens caris lapillis purpura et aureis ornantur fibulis et incedentibus a viris assurgitur ociosis morientium substantie numerantur. (ibid., 226)

(Let them applaud Veturia, then, and honor her name whenever they adorn themselves with precious jewels, royal vestments, and gold brooches, and whenever men stand up as they go by, and let them squander in idleness the wealth of the dead.) (*Famous Women*, 121)

By stressing both the inferiority of contemporary women and the dire consequences of women's actions in the past, Boccaccio's text therefore leaves the implied female reader in some doubt as to how to draw inspiration from any of the women described in his work.¹⁰⁷

Christine's view of history in the *Cité* contrasts markedly with that of both Petrarch and Boccaccio, and even differs substantially from the one set out in many of her other historical and political writings. In the *Policie* and the *Paix*, for instance, where Christine is witness to the increasingly perilous situation of civil war in France, she echoes the commonplace late medieval view of contemporary society's decadence and decline.¹⁰⁸ In the *Mutacion*, she employs the Augustinian typology of the six ages of man, ending with a description of the

¹⁰⁶ See Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Décadence ou progrès? Christine de Pizan, Boccaccio et la question de l'"âge d'or"', *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 295–306; Judith L. Kellogg, 'Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio: rewriting classical mythic tradition', in Cornelia N. Moore and Raymond A. Moody, eds., *Comparative Literature East and West: Tradition and Trends*, vol. 1 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, and the East-West Center, 1989), 124–31; McLeod, *Virtue*, 71–3.

¹⁰⁷ McLeod, *Virtue*, 78. See also Laura Torretta, 'Il Liber de Claris Mulieribus di Giovanni Boccaccio', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana* 39 (1902), 254–92. However, for a different view, see Anna Cerbo, 'Il De Claris Mulieribus di Giovanni Boccaccio', *Atti e Memorie dell'Arcadia* s.3, 6,3 (1974), 51–75.

¹⁰⁸ See Rosalind Brown-Grant, 'Les exilées du pouvoir: Christine de Pizan et la femme devant la crise du Moyen Age finissant', in Claude Thomasset and Michel Zink, eds., *Apogée et déclin: Actes du Colloque de l'URA 411, Provins, 1991* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993), 211–24.

present time as an age of decrepitude.¹⁰⁹ Even in the *Cité*, when discussing her male contemporaries she laments both the decline of men's attitudes towards women, as evidenced by an ever-increasing readiness to slander them (884), and the decadence of State and Church as institutions controlled by men: 'Et se tu me veulz dire que ces choses fussent jadis et que a present soyent bons, tu puez veoir aujourd'uy en tous estaz se le monde va en amendant et se grant fermeté et grant constance a es faiz et es consaulx, tant des princes temporelz comme des espirituelz' (898).

By contrast, when discussing women's role in the history of civilisation in the *Cité*, Christine adopts a perspective of progress rather than one of decline. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that her rhetorical aims differ according to whether she is writing about men or about women. In her historical and political works, where Christine's explicit aim is to take a negative stance and bewail the decline of morality in the knights and rulers of her own day compared with the virtue of those in the past, she necessarily takes a short-term view of history. In the *Cité*, where her whole purpose is to be positive and to defend women, she analyses history from the long term in order to valorise the contribution made by the female sex to human progress. She expresses this view of history and of women's historical role most clearly in her only explicit disagreement with Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* in the whole of the *Cité*, where she marks her 'ideological independence'¹¹⁰ from her source by her rejection of the myth of the Golden Age.¹¹¹ On this question, Christine was not only opposing Boccaccio but also going against one of the most prevalent attitudes in both classical and medieval culture.

The form in which the late Middle Ages knew the myth of the Golden Age was determined largely by the works of Ovid and Boethius. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid paints an idealised picture of the Age of Saturn in which neither technology nor war had yet been invented, an age which came to an end when Jupiter usurped Saturn's throne and humankind discovered precious metals and the

¹⁰⁹ *Mutacion*, vol. 2, lines 8256–399. See Paul Archambault, 'The ages of man and the ages of the world: a study of two traditions', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 12 (1966), 193–228; and Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹¹⁰ Phillippy, 'Establishing authority', 168.

¹¹¹ Brown-Grant, 'Décadence'.

power that such discoveries could bring them.¹¹² Boethius follows Ovid's account closely in the *Consolation of Philosophy* but adds his own moral and Christian interpretation to the legend.¹¹³ For Boethius, the end of the Golden Age recalls the Fall of Adam and Eve, although he asserts that it is better that humans should exercise free will and be conscious that sin has come into the world, rather than remain in a state of primitive ignorance, lived purely according to their instincts. The Golden Age had also been evoked at length by Jean de Meung in the *Rose*, through the discourses of four different characters: Raison, Ami, La Vieille and Genius, all of whom subscribe to the Ovidian version of the legend.¹¹⁴ For the most part, these characters express nostalgia for the fact that the end of the Golden Age also entailed the end of innocence in love. In their view, this loss of innocence brought about constraints on human liberty and thus a need for fraud and deceit in amorous relations between men and women.

All of these authorities, including Boccaccio, favour the primitivist myth of the Golden Age, that is, that humans were once wild and yet content, innocent of the unhappiness that progress would bring into the world. Christine would therefore seem to be one of the first late medieval writers to support an anti-primitivist thesis and to argue for the positive effects of civilisation and of human inventions.¹¹⁵ As evidence of women's intellectual capacities, Raison claims that discoveries such as the letters of the alphabet, arms and agriculture

¹¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), Book I, lines 65–176. See also A. O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 43–65.

¹¹³ *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book II, metre v. See also George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 64–7.

¹¹⁴ See the *Rose*, lines 5505–58 on Raison, 8325–424 and 9463–648 on Ami, 13817–4156 on La Vieille, and 19994–20190 on Genius. See also Paul B. Milan, 'The Golden Age and the political theory of Jean de Meung: a myth in *Rose* scholarship', *Symposium* 23 (1969), 137–49; F. W. A. George, 'Jean de Meung and the myth of the Golden Age', in H. T. Barnwell, ed., *The Classical Tradition in French Literature: Essays Presented to R. C. Knight* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1977), 31–9.

¹¹⁵ In Antiquity, only the Epicureans seem to have subscribed to a view of progress in human history, of which Lucretius (in *The Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald E. Latham Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952, Book V, lines 800–1457), would seem to have been the chief exponent: see Bury, *Idea of Progress*, 15–18; and Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism*, 222–42. However, Christine is unlikely to have encountered Lucretius' text as only fragments of it were known in the Middle Ages: see R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 262. Her views on progress nonetheless correspond closely to those of her contemporary, the preacher Jacques Legrand: see Evencio Beltran, 'Christine de Pizan, Jacques Legrand et le *Communiloquium* de Jean de Galles', *Romania* 104 (1983), 208–28.

were all brought into the world by pagan women (Nicostrata [735–9], Minerva [739–43], Ceres [743–4] and Isis [745–6] respectively). These stories are followed by an account of the usefulness of their inventions, in the course of which a fifth example is cited, Arachne (753–4), who discovered the art of weaving. In this discussion, Raison argues that the historical significance of these women's deeds is that they brought civilisation to otherwise barbarous and lawless people. Citing the example of Ceres, she states that 'par ceste dame fu ramené le siecle de bestialleté a vie humaine et raisonnable' (744), a declaration which is repeated in the case of each of these pagan women.

Raison goes on to summarise all the steps towards progress which women have helped humankind to make, stating unequivocally that they have facilitated the founding of cities, the improvement of agriculture, and the development of learning (749–50). Christine, in response to Raison, reiterates her charge that misogynists are lacking in gratitude in failing to acknowledge women's intellectual capacities and their contribution to the development of civilised life:

Ha! dame, or apperçoy par ce que vous dittes, plus qu'oncques mais, la tres grant ingratitude et desconnoissance d'iceulx hommes qui tant mesdient des femmes: car nonobstant que il me semblast que assez cause souffisant y avoit de nom les blasmer parce que femme est a tout homme mere et les autres biens que on voit magnifiquement que generaument femmes font a hommes, vrayement voycy comble de benefices et a souveraine largesce que ilz ont receu, et reçoivent, d'elles. (751)

As in the *Dieu d'Amours*, where, using Cupid as a mouthpiece, Christine castigated both clerks and knights for slandering women, so here she exposes their bad faith for refusing to appreciate that those objects on which they depend for their livelihood, the Latin alphabet and arms respectively, are things which women have brought into the world (*ibid.*).

As part of the process of *anamnesis* used to correct the memories of misogynists and to reproach them for their ingratitude, the *Cité* contrasts their response to women's inventions with that of the people who were the original beneficiaries of them. For example, Raison explains how Nicostrata's discovery of the Latin alphabet was greatly appreciated by her contemporaries: 'de ce benefice n'ont pas esté ingras les Ytaliens, et a bon droit' (737, emphasis added). Indeed, they expressed their gratitude and celebrated this achievement for posterity by constructing a monument to their benefactress:

'ilz luy edifierent un temple que ilz dedierent en son nom' (ibid.), an action which is repeated by the compatriots of other pagan women such as Minerva (741) and Isis (746).

The final step in Raison's argument is an appeal to divine authority, since she claims that the ultimate proof of the usefulness of women's inventions lies in the use that Jesus made of them: 'car il usa de pain, de vin, de char de poisson, de robe de couleur, de linge et de tous si faiz necessaires, laquel chose n'eust point fait se mieulx fust user de glans et de cenelles' (755). Christine denies categorically that there ever was a primitive Golden Age, since true human happiness resides in those things which help people to live more civilised lives (754). Unlike Jean de Meung, who distinguishes in the *Rose* between the natural order which prevailed during the Golden Age and the conventional order set up afterwards to combat and contain moral corruption,¹¹⁶ Christine presents social organisation as, in itself, better than the laws of nature. In this respect, she follows Aquinas' positive view of the state as part of divine order rather than as simply functioning to repress evil in the post-lapsarian world.¹¹⁷ The *Cité* thus links the notions of civilisation and improvement of the human condition with that of salvation itself. Whilst Raison argues that it is pagan women who have taken these important temporal steps in human history, Droiture explains how it is the Virgin who has taken the vital spiritual step, one for which all men should be grateful: 'O! comment est jamais homme si ingrat que il oublie que par femme la porte de paradis luy est ouverte? C'est par la Vierge Marie – quel plus grant bien puet demander? et que Dieux est fait homme? – si que devant t'a esté dit' (856).

In contrast to the view shared by Petrarch in the *De Viris* and Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus* of history as a process of decline, which explains the lack of contemporary examples in their texts, Christine sees history in terms of progress, so that her catalogue of women *does* include examples from her own time. Moreover, this progressivist theory of history allows her to emphasise the continuity between women of the past and those of the present in terms of their virtue, as opposed to Boccaccio's view, expressed in the *De Casibus*, of human history as merely a continuum of vice. So, contrary to

¹¹⁶ Milan, 'The Golden Age', 148.

¹¹⁷ See Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 183.

McLeod's argument that the pattern of history which emerges in the course of the *Cité* is universal, secular and cyclical,¹¹⁸ Christine's concept of continuity means that she in fact *precludes* the notion of a cyclical return to the past. In stressing progress over decline, Christine not only argues that in the past women have played a key role in both temporal progress towards civilisation and spiritual progress towards salvation, but also shows how, within the spheres of the community, the family and the individual, there has been a continuous line of female virtue up to the present. In Books I and II, pagan and Christian *exempla* of martial courage, intellect, filial love and constancy sit side by side. In Book III, on women's spiritual equality with men, which of necessity includes only Christian *exempla*, Christine places both stories of holy women associated with the earliest Apostles, such as Ephigenia and Maximilla, and later accounts of martyrs within the established Church, such as St Catherine of Alexandria. Finally, in the address to her audience at the end of Book III of the *Cité*, Christine stresses that this continuity will even extend into the future, with every new virtuous reader taking her place among the ranks of women already assembled inside: 'Mes tres redoubtees dames, Dieux soit louez, or est du tout achevee et parfaite nostre cité, en laquelle a grant honneur vous toutes celles qui amez vertus, gloire et loz povez estre hebergees, *tant les passees dames, comme les presentes et celles a avenir*, car pour toute dame honnourable est faite et fondee' (1031, emphasis added).¹¹⁹

Unlike Boccaccio in the *De Mulieribus*, whose choice of *exempla* obeys no logic of presentation other than that of chronology, Christine sets out her models within the framework of a moral hierarchy. This hierarchy is reflected in the allegory of the city itself, whereby the pagan warriors and inventors are the foundations of the defence of women and the saints and martyrs represent its culmination. These distinctions correspond roughly to Aristotle's definitions of practical philosophy: politics (the individual in relation to the state); economics (the individual in relation to the family); and ethics (the individual as individual), although Christine transposes ethics into theology, which concerns the spiritual good of individuals rather than just their moral good.¹²⁰ However, unlike Aristotle, and indeed

¹¹⁸ McLeod, *Virtue*, 133. ¹¹⁹ See also *Cité*, 970.

¹²⁰ Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 48–9.

most medieval political theorists,¹²¹ Christine places the sphere of economics above that of politics in her hierarchy, ranking the deeds of wives and mothers above those of warriors and teachers, as *Raison* indicates at the end of Book I of the *Cité* where she uses the metaphor of the foundations to show that the rest of the text is both figuratively and literally superior to it: 'bien me semble que desormais doit souffire en ce que je t'ay basti es murs de la closture de la Cité des Dames; or sont tous achevez et enduiz. Viengnent avant mes autres suers, et par leur aide et devis soit par toy parfaicte le *seurplus* de l'ediffice' (778, emphasis added). This preference places woman's domestic role as *mulier economica*, an office which is acknowledged by both philosophers and theologians alike as the 'natural' one for women,¹²² above her political role in offices which are more usually designated as male preserves. Therefore, whilst Christine adopts a highly conventional medieval view of womanhood, she also valorises the role which most of her female readers would actually have been expected to fulfil. Whereas Boccaccio finds virtue in those women who, as viragoes, managed to transcend their sex, Christine devotes over half of her text to women who virtuously performed the roles which are specific to their gender. How, then, were Christine's readers encouraged to interpret and emulate the virtuous examples put forward in the *Cité*? How could they be expected to draw for inspiration on the lives of women like the pagan warriors and the virgin martyrs whose circumstances were so different from their own?

The *exempla* in Books I and III of the *Cité* deal, for the most part, with exceptional women who were acting under extraordinary conditions. In Book I, many of the heroines demonstrating martial courage and leadership are initially obliged to do so out of practical necessity. The Amazons, for instance, first take up arms on being widowed and are forced to defend their country against invaders (681). Similarly, Cornificia has to take the unusual step of adopting a masculine disguise in order to receive an education (724). The exceptional quality of the women who discovered new arts and

¹²¹ See Aristotle, *Politica*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Works of Aristotle*, Book I, ch. 2: 'the state is by nature prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part'. See also Ullmann, *Political Thought*, 168.

¹²² See Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, 'Comment les théologiens et les philosophes voient la femme', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 20 (1977), 105–29; Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 58–9.

sciences is indicated by the fact that their contemporaries imputed a divine origin to them, as in the examples of Minerva, Ceres and Isis. Others were deemed to have been given divine assistance, such as Nicostrata, of whom it was thought that 'elle estoit amee du dieu Mercurius' (735). Like the women in Book I, those in Book III are also presented as the equals of men, but here they are praised for the strength of their faith and their willingness to suffer in defence of it (978). However, Justice indicates that the virgin martyrs and saints are also extraordinary figures, since theirs is the most elevated vocation to which a woman can aspire: 'desquelles les vies sont belles a ouyr, de bon exemple a toute femme sur toute autre sagesce. Et pour ce ycestes seront les plus supperlatives de nostre cité' (ibid.).

Given the very exceptional nature of the heroines whose lives are recounted in Books I and III, the more direct relevance of Book II to Christine's implied female readership is signalled by the fact that she places most of her examples of contemporary virtuous women, such as the princesses and noble ladies of France, in this section.¹²³ These ladies, though of high social status, are nonetheless largely referred to as good wives and mothers, since it is in these capacities that their virtuous conduct will make itself manifest. A typical example is that of Valentina Visconti, wife of Louis d'Orléans: 'De laquelle plus prudente dame se pourroit dire? Forte et constante dame en courage, de grant amour a son seigneur, de bonne dottrine a ses enfans, avisee en gouvernement, juste envers tous, de maintien saige et en toutes choses tres vertueuse' (968). This description, along with many of the other examples of domestic virtue given in the *Cité*, could have served as a model for the precepts of chastity, fidelity and discretion delivered to princesses in its sequel, the *Trois Vertus*, which addresses women's pragmatic concerns directly. Moreover, at the very end of the *Cité*, in line with the *exempla* presented in Book II, Christine addresses her audience in terms of their marital status as maidens, wives and widows, irrespective of their socio-economic estate, and recommends virtuous conduct to them purely in the domestic sphere, in recognition of the fact that their actions will largely be confined to this sphere (1031–6).

What, then, is the significance of the stories of illustrious women in Books I and III of the *Cité*, if Book II is the only one which

¹²³ See Glynnis M. Cropp, 'Les personnages féminins tirés de l'histoire de la France dans le *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 195–208.

contains examples that Christine's readership could feasibly be expected to follow? On the one hand, Christine would seem to be arguing that women are capable of great exploits in domains outside their role as wives and mothers, but without necessarily *advocating* that her contemporaries should actually perform such. This is not to say that she marks a complete separation between the domestic and the public spheres.¹²⁴ As McLeod has rightly pointed out, Book II 'attempts to place women within the context of the community'.¹²⁵ However, it is debatable whether this lack of separation between the spheres is due to Christine's 'humanist sentiments', as McLeod suggests.¹²⁶ Rather, it is a medieval commonplace that private virtue has public effects, an ethical view which Christine applies to women in the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus* as much as she does to men in the *Othéa* and the *Avison*.¹²⁷

On the other hand, the fact that the Amazons and the virgin martyrs are presented as 'exemplary', rather than as literally 'imitable',¹²⁸ does not necessarily prevent them from acting as role models for Christine's readers. Her contemporary, the Augustinian preacher Jacques Legrand, shows himself to be equally concerned with this matter in his *Livre des bonnes meurs*, a series of *sermones ad status* in which he cites examples of wives who were so devoted to their husbands that they killed themselves on hearing of their spouses' deaths. Far from suggesting that his female readership should do likewise, Legrand signals the difference between understanding the moral point of an *exemplum* and slavishly imitating the behaviour of its protagonists: 'Et ja soit de ce que *ainsi faire ne soit couvenable ne necessaire*, toutesvoies appert il par les dittes hystoires

¹²⁴ The domestic sphere for a noblewoman would in fact have meant a large household and lands which it was her task to manage and administer: see S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 268.

¹²⁵ McLeod, *Virtue*, 132.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁷ On the importance of this idea, derived from the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* and Giles of Rome's *De Regimine Principum*, which also influenced the *Othéa* and the *Avison*, see Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's ethical microcosm and political macrocosm', in Alastair J. Minnis, ed., *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 135–62, 139: 'Ethical self-governance, therefore, enables men to contribute to their communities, both the small community of the family and the large community of the body politic.'

¹²⁸ This distinction is taken from Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, trans., *Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women* (London: Dent, 1996), xiii.

comment en mariage l'en doit avoir grant amour.¹²⁹ Similarly, in order to empower her female contemporaries by encouraging them to pursue virtue within their existing social conditions, Christine indicates how her readers can emulate the *qualities* shown by the exceptional women of Books I and III of the *Cité*, even if they cannot literally imitate their *deeds*, by translating these qualities into her readers' own realm of experience. For example, at the end of Book I of the text she draws a parallel between the actions of women warriors and intellectuals and those of wives and mothers by referring to their shared quality of prudence. The relevance of this quality to the women of Book II, and by implication to Christine's female readers, is shown by the fact that the epitome of prudence (as a key aspect of women's rationality) which the text discusses is the conventional description from Proverbs 31:10–31 of the good wife: '“Qui trouvera femme forte, c'est a dire prudente, son mary n'ara pas faulte de tous biens”' (765). Unlike martial prowess and academic learning which are presented as culturally specific, and to which women's access – as far as Christine's contemporaries are concerned – is now limited, prudence is presented as innate in both sexes and therefore as a quality which may be increased by learning but is not created by it (763).¹³⁰ Even if Christine's readers could not aspire to being warriors or teachers, they could still cultivate the quality of prudence, the exercise of which she specifically associates with women in their married lives.

The *Cité* therefore valorises women's role as wives and mothers in Book II by translating the qualities of the exceptional women in Books I and III into domestic terms. In this sense, as Judith Kellogg has argued, the three-part structure of the *Cité* echoes the three parts 'texte', 'glose' and 'allegorie', which comprise the stories recounted in the mythographical *Othéa*, with Book I corresponding to the 'texte', in which women's *literal* deeds are celebrated, Book II to the 'glose', read for women's *moral* deeds, and Book III to the 'allegorie', read for their *spiritual* deeds.¹³¹ This method of reading the *Cité* allows us to analyse how Christine rehabilitates two key areas of

¹²⁹ *Livre des bonnes meurs*, 369, emphasis added.

¹³⁰ See McLeod, *Virtue*, 127, n. 35: Christine here claims for women a moral virtue which both Plato and Aristotle saw as more prevalent in men than women. See also Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 49–50.

¹³¹ Kellogg, 'Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio', 124–31, 129.

women's experience which had traditionally been reviled by misogynists: female language, which they had characterised exclusively in terms of speech and associated with garrulity and riot; and the body, which they had depicted as an erotic site of carnality and sin. Christine relates the virtue exhibited by women in each of these areas of experience across the three spheres of influence which are explored in the different parts of the text: the community, the family and the individual.

In the prologue of the *Cité*, as we have seen, Raison argues that despite the claims of misogynists, women have in fact used language for positive ends, an argument which the rest of the text proceeds to illustrate in literal, moral and spiritual terms. Moreover, in Book I the *Cité* extends women's virtuous use of language to *written* texts, in contrast to anti-feminists who focus solely on women's speech and its negative effects. Raison celebrates pagan women's gift of the Latin alphabet and of written laws to their communities in terms of their literal significance for the development of civilised society. The alphabet invented by Nicostrata facilitates communication between people and so advances learning, whilst laws such as those devised by Isis explicitly replace barbarism with order: 'Elle donna et ordena certaines lois bonnes et droitturieres; aprist aux gens d'Egypte, qui vivoyent rudement et sans loy de justice n'ordenance, a vivre par ordre de droiture' (745). Raison also applauds as a literal achievement the actions of Christian women like Proba, who perfected exegetical readings of Vergil and Homer and extracted the word of God out of pagan texts (725–6).

If women's relationship to language in Book I is rehabilitated by showing how certain exceptional individuals developed literacy, with its civilising influence for humanity as a whole, Book II presents women's use of language in moral and domestic terms, valorising the spoken eloquence of those characters who saved husband and family from danger and dismay through good advice, peacemaking, conversion and consolation. These roles are consonant with those outlined for women's speech in the *Trois Vertus* and, indeed, in many medieval marriage sermons.¹³² In reply to the misogynist claim that husbands should not listen to their wives' counsel, Droiture enumerates the examples of women, both pagan and Christian, whose advice proved

¹³² See d'Alverny, 'Comment'; and Liliane Dulac, 'The representation and functions of feminine speech in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 13–22.

beneficial to their husbands: Antonia, who persuaded her husband Belisarius to obey his king's commands (853–5), and the unnamed wife of Alexander the Great, who persuaded her husband to suffer illness with dignity rather than committing suicide (855). Droiture also relates women's speech to their role as peacemakers: the Sabine women beg their husbands and fathers to call off their battle with each other (867); Veturia the Roman woman implores her son to spare the city (869). Furthermore, Droiture records how a Christian woman converted her husband to the faith, an example which explicitly links speech to the idea of charity: Clotilda, wife of King Clovis, 'ne fînoit de timonner et prier son seigneur que il voulsist recevoir la sainte foy et estre baptisiez' (870).¹³³ Finally, as an example of women's role as comforters to their spouses, Droiture tells the story of Queen Hypsicratea, who consoled her husband in his exile 'par la doulceur de ses parolles' (823).

Droiture shows not only how women's speech has positively helped their loved ones, but also how women can control their speech and maintain secrecy, thus refuting the assertion (repeated in the *Rose*) that 'femmes ne scevent riens celler' (843). Citing the example of an unnamed Roman woman, Droiture shows how, in contrast to the male conspirators who met at her house and were loose in their talk ('pas assez sagement ne se gardèrent de parler', 848), this woman refused to divulge their secret plan to assassinate the tyrants who were ruling the city at that time (*ibid.*).

Whilst in Book I women's role has been to provide language and laws by which to save a people from bestiality, and in Book II to save husbands and family from despondency, in Book III women's language has the spiritual function of rescuing the souls of individual unbelievers from damnation. The martyrs' tormentors who refuse to convert are described as being in a state even lower than that of beasts, thus emphasising their perversity in choosing to ignore the perilous position of their souls. In the longest biography of Book III, one devoted significantly to the author's namesake, St Christine castigates the judge who is torturing her as a '“Cruel felon, plus que beste sauvage”' (1005). In several of the stories, this point is further underscored by the fact that the wild animal set upon the martyr to

¹³³ Sharon Farmer, 'Persuasive voices: clerical images of medieval wives', *Speculum* 61,3 (1986), 517–43, 533, discusses how thirteenth-century theologians, such as Thomas of Chobham, used this example of a wife's conversion of her spouse to argue that all women should act as 'preachers to their husbands'.

kill her recognises her sanctity and spares her, whereas the tormentor does not. St Theodosina is unharmed by leopards (997), St Martina tames a wild lion (989), whilst St Christine, tormented by snakes, thanks God that “‘les serpens horribles congnoissent en moy ta dignité’”, even when her tormentor fails to do so (1007).

The martyr's whole function is to be kept alive by God in order to convert as many people as possible through her ‘predicacion’.¹³⁴ The example of St Martina states this clearly: ‘Et Dieux la gardoit que elle si tost ne mourust, adfin que les tourmenteurs et le puepple eussent cause de eulx convertir’ (987). The importance of the martyr's speech is even emphasised by the fact that she continues to speak even after having had her tongue cut out.¹³⁵ St Christine blinds her tormentor by spitting out the stub of her tongue and mocks him for thinking that he could silence her by this method: “‘Tirant, que te vault avoir couppee ma langue adfin que elle ne beneysse Dieu, quant mon esperit a tousjours le beneystra et le tien demourera perpetuel en maleysson?’” (1009).

Whilst the women who founded laws, invented the alphabet and converted pagans to Christianity were certainly exceptional in their use of language, the advice and comfort which wives give to their husbands is presented by Christine as both laudable in moral terms and accessible to all women. In line with her general view of progress in history, the *Cité* shows how women's use of language has had, and can continue to have, a civilising influence on society as a whole and a comforting effect on individual men.

In addition to rehabilitating women's language, the *Cité* is equally concerned with reclaiming the female body, literally, morally and spiritually, as a site of virtue rather than of vice, as misogynist writers would have their readers believe.¹³⁶ In many of the stories in Book I, the female body is physically de-eroticised in order to stress that a woman can exhibit the same martial qualities as a man. The example of the Amazons, many of whom (like Synoppe and Penthesilea)

¹³⁴ See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, ‘Saints’ lives and the female reader’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27,4 (1991), 314–32, 315.

¹³⁵ See Kevin Brownlee, ‘Martyrdom and the female voice: Saint Christine in the *Cité des Dames*’, in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 115–35; Quilligan, *Allegory*, 212–41; Quilligan, ‘Translating dismemberment’.

¹³⁶ See Karras, ‘Gendered sin’, 237, who observes: ‘the equation of woman with flesh, though not new to the Middle Ages, continued as a powerful force behind monastic misogyny and its social repercussions’.

maintain a perpetual virginity, shows how the female body can be put to service in defence of the state. Raison's etymological explanation of the Amazons' name as meaning 'desmamellees' indicates the extent to which the women warriors literally divest themselves of an erotic attribute like the breast, the better to take up arms against their enemies (682–3).¹³⁷ She also recounts the stories of women who de-eroticise their bodies for the good of the state through less drastic means than the Amazons. Zenobia, for example, follows her husband into battle to protect his kingdom by suppressing her corporeal femininity: 'adonc Cenobie, qui pas ne fist grant force de garder la frescheur de sa biauté, se disposa de souffrir le travail d'armes avec son mary, vestir le harnois et estre participant avec luy en tous labours en l'exercite de chevalerie' (702).

In Book II, these extraordinary exploits are translated into domestic terms: the wives in this section are shown to have transformed the meaning of their bodies not physically but morally, by preserving their chastity for their own and their husbands' sakes. Droiture cites the standard *exempla* of both biblical and pagan figures, including Susanna (876), Sarah (878), Lucretia (885–7, 959) and Penelope (880–1), in order to attest to this virtuous quality in women. To the example of Antonia, the beautiful but chaste wife of Drusus Tiberius, she adds an important gloss which compares a woman resisting pressure from suitors to a body remaining unharmed in a burning furnace, 'estre entre les flames sans soy ardoir' (883). This gloss thus draws a parallel between the preservation of a woman's chastity in the face of temptation and the martyrdom of the virgins in furnaces in Book III, and so has the effect of valorising, by association, the virtuous actions of wives.

In order to underscore the importance of challenging the misogynist characterisation of the female body as essentially lustful, the *Cité* privileges the moral virtue of bodily chastity over emotional fidelity. It is significant that the only examples of female behaviour which are not fully condoned and applauded in Christine's text are those which concern women who were faithful in love but not chaste, since their love was outside marriage and thus constituted an 'inclinacion charnelle' (927). Whilst the stories of women such as Dido, Medea, Hero and Ghismonda are adduced by Droiture as

¹³⁷ See John A. Nichols, 'Female nudity and sexuality in medieval art', in DuBruck, *New Images*, 165–206.

examples of women's fidelity, they are also cited as cautionary tales against unchastity since all of them met a tragic end:

Mais ses piteux exemples et assez d'autres que dire te pourroye ne doivent mie estre cause d'esmuouvoir les couraiges des femmes de eulx fichier en celle mer tres perilleuse et dampnable de folle amour, car tousjours en est la fin mauvaïse a leur grant prejudice et grief en corps, en bien et en honneur et a l'ame, qui plus est. (951–2)¹³⁸

The virgin martyrs of Book III represent the supreme model of the rehabilitated female body in the *Cité*, since their tortured limbs symbolise the triumph of the soul over the flesh and dissolve the misogynist equation of woman with the erotic body.¹³⁹ In Tertullian's phrase, 'the spirit is crowned in the flesh and the flesh does not draw the eyes and sighs of young men'.¹⁴⁰ The martyr demonstrates the extent to which the tormentor is misguided in seeking first to desire her physical beauty, and secondly to torture her body in anger at her refusal either to marry him or to worship pagan gods, when, in both instances, it is her piety which he should seek to emulate through his own conversion. As St Martina explains to the emperor who desires her: '“Je suis chrestienne offerte a Dieu le vif, qui se delitte en corps chaste et en cuer net, et a celluy je sacrefie et m'y recommande”' (986). Just as the virgin martyr's chastity cannot be taken from her without her consent, so her physical body constantly returns to a miraculous state of health until the moment of her death, as the example of St Macra illustrates: 'Et entre ses tourmens ot les mamelles errachiers. Et après, si comme elle estoit en la chartre, Dieu luy envoya son ange qui luy restabli sa santé' (994).

Whilst, obviously, Christine could not expect her audience to de-eroticise themselves in physical terms as did the Amazons, nor to transcend the body in spiritual terms through martyrdom, she could nevertheless encourage them to translate these qualities into moral terms and to strive to be chaste wives and to guard against the transient pleasures of unchastity by heeding the *exempla in malo* of women such as Dido and Medea who loved 'par amor'.

Christine's theory of history in the *Cité*, one based on a pattern of

¹³⁸ McLeod, *Virtue*, 131–2.

¹³⁹ See Benjamin Semple, 'The male psyche and the female sacred body in Marie de France and Christine de Pizan', in Françoise Jaouën and Benjamin Semple, eds., *Corps Mystique, Corps Sacré: Textual Transfigurations of the Body from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994), 164–86; and Michelle Donovan, 'Rewriting hagiography: the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*', *Women in French Studies* 4 (1996), 14–26.

¹⁴⁰ Tertullian, *The Appearance of Women*, II.3, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 52.

progress, is coupled with her choice of examples to reveal the thematic continuity of female virtue across the different spheres of society. Her views differ significantly from those of both Boccaccio, for whom human history in the *De Casibus* is a linear continuum of vice, and in the *De Mulieribus* an ambiguous legacy of pagan values, and of Petrarch, for whom only a cyclical return to the past could allow his contemporaries to find glory equivalent to that of the Romans. Moreover, rather than writing against her female contemporaries or urging them to be more like men, as did Boccaccio, Christine shows how the qualities exhibited by extraordinary women in the past could also be demonstrated by women of the present acting in more ordinary roles.

CONCLUSION

In the *Othéa* and the *Avision*, Christine had addressed male readers and encouraged them to see women on the same footing with men as bearers of moral truths. In the *Cité*, Christine turned directly to a female readership in order to provide them with a more positive view of womankind than that propounded by writers in the misogynist tradition. Given this audience and aim, she was obliged to recast the conventions of the catalogue genre, such as the title and the preface, which she had inherited from her predecessors, Petrarch and Boccaccio. But it was not just the formal devices typically used in the genre which she re-worked. In addressing the female reader and using models of women with which to inspire rather than to reprove her contemporaries, Christine needed to adopt a view of history which was radically different from that of Petrarch or Boccaccio, one which accounted for the continuation of female virtue from pagan and biblical times to her own present day. Thus, whilst Christine's critique of misogyny in the *Cité* is firmly rooted in medieval culture, in terms both of its literary techniques such as the use of an allegorical framework and of the kind of defence of women which she offered, one based on theological beliefs about women's rational and moral potential, she was also able to put these aspects of orthodox thought to new ends. The significance of the *Cité* lies not in its anticipation of twentieth-century feminism but in the way in which Christine offers her female readership models of behaviour which, unlike those in Boccaccio's catalogue, *are* meant to be accessible to all medieval women. If, in the *Cité*, Christine argued

that the two sexes are equal, at least in terms of their propensity for virtue, and encouraged her readers to emulate the qualities exhibited by her historical heroines, it is in the *Trois Vertus* that she was to provide a more detailed blueprint for her female contemporaries in all strata of society to follow.

CHAPTER 5

The 'Livre des Trois Vertus': a betrayal of the 'Cité'?

Like the *Cité*, to which it is the sequel, Christine's *Trois Vertus* addresses the female reader directly, but her aim in this latter text is to offer women concrete advice on how to live a virtuous existence in this world.¹ This pragmatic work therefore appears, at first sight, to have little to do with Christine's earlier defence of women which openly challenged the anti-feminist tradition by reading female characters allegorically, so as to stress their human essence, and by celebrating women's achievements throughout the course of history. In fact, the *Trois Vertus* can be seen as a continuation of its predecessor and as an integral part of Christine's refutation of misogyny, for here, by adopting the genre of the courtesy book,² she provides her readers with a lesson in how women themselves, by their praiseworthy actions in their everyday lives, can prove misogynists wrong.

Written in 1405, the *Trois Vertus* proved to be one of Christine's most popular works, as attested by the large number of extant

¹ All page and line references in the body of this chapter are to the *Trois Vertus* unless otherwise stated. For a modern English translation which refers to the text by its alternative title of *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, see Charity Cannon Willard, trans., *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies* (New York: Persea Books, 1989). For a general overview of the text, see Willard, 'A fifteenth-century view of woman's role in medieval society: Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*', in Rosemary T. Morewedge, ed., *The Role of Woman in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton 6–7 May, 1972* (Albany/London: State University of New York Press/Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 90–120; Willard, 'The *Livre des Trois Vertus*: feminine ideal or practical advice?', in Bornstein, *Ideals*, 91–116; and Willard, *Life*, 145–53.

² For an introduction to medieval courtesy literature for women, see Alice A. Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique du moyen âge s'adressant spécialement aux femmes* (Cahors: A. Coueslant, 1903; Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975), 154–61; Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana/London: University of Illinois Press, 1956); Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1983).

manuscripts and early printed editions.³ However, compared to her other texts such as the *Othéa*, the *Trois Vertus* seems to have appealed more to a middle-class audience at the end of the fifteenth century than to Christine's immediate patrons, the royal families of Orléans, Burgundy and Berry, since no luxurious presentation copy of the text survives, whereas there is an unusually high number of paper manuscripts which were presumably owned by a less wealthy readership.⁴ The *Trois Vertus* was translated into Portuguese sometime between 1447 and 1455,⁵ and ran to three different printed editions in French before the middle of the sixteenth century, when it and other works in the courtesy book genre fell out of fashion.

Critical opinion in the twentieth century has not always shared the enthusiasm with which the *Trois Vertus* was received in its own time. Although scholars looking at the text from an historical point of view have found it to be an invaluable source of information on medieval women's lives,⁶ those analysing the *Trois Vertus* from a literary perspective have often found it disappointing in comparison

³ *Trois Vertus*, xviii–xxv; Mathilde Laigle, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus de Christine de Pisan et son milieu historique et littéraire*, Bibliothèque du XVe siècle, 16 (Paris: Champion, 1912), 34–48.

⁴ See Charity Cannon Willard, 'The Three Virtues of Christine de Pizan', *Boston Public Library Quarterly* 2 (October 1950), 291–305; and Willard, 'The manuscript tradition of the *Livre des Trois Vertus* and Christine de Pizan's audience', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27,3 (1966), 433–44. See also Eric Hicks, 'Le Livre des Trois Vertus of Christine de Pizan: Beinecke ms. 427', in Daniel Poirion and Nancy Freeman Regalado, eds., *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, special issue of *Yale French Studies* (Yale University Press, 1991), 57–71; James C. Laidlaw, 'Un manuscrit original du *Livre des Trois Vertus*: Londres, British Library, Ms Additional 31841', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 399–410; and Jacques Lemaire, 'Manuscripts proches parents ou manuscrits simplement semblables? Réflexions codicologiques et philologiques à propos de deux témoins du *Livre des Trois Vertus* de Christine de Pizan', *ibid.*, 411–30.

⁵ For an edition of the Portuguese translation, see Dorothy Carstens-Grokenberger, ed., *Christine de Pisan: 'Buch von den drei Tugenden' in portugiesischer Übersetzung*, Portugiesische Forschungen der Görresgesellschaft, ed. Hans Flasche, series 2, vol. 1 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961). See also Charity Cannon Willard, 'A Portuguese translation of Christine de Pisan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*', *PMLA* 78,5 (1963), 459–64; and Willard, 'Isabel of Portugal, patroness of humanism?', in Franco Simone, ed., *Miscellanea di studi e ricerche sul Quattrocento francese* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1967), 519–44.

⁶ See Margarete Zimmermann, '"Sages et prudentes mainagieres" in Christine de Pizans *Livre des Trois Vertus*', in Trude Ehlert, ed., *Haushalt und Familie in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Vorträge eines interdisziplinären Symposions vom 6.–9. Juni 1990 an der Rheinischen Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität Bonn* (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1991), 193–206; Josette A. Wisman, 'Aspects socio-économiques du *Livre des Trois Vertus* de Christine de Pizan', *Le Moyen Français* 30 (1992), 27–44; Kenneth Varty, 'Autour du *Livre des Trois Vertus* ou si rayon, droiture et justice faisaient des cours d'introduction à la civilisation française du moyen âge?', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 161–72.

with the *Cité*.⁷ The differences between the two texts are indeed striking: in the *Cité*, Christine praises the outstanding deeds accomplished by women as leaders, warriors, teachers, artists and saints, thereby offering an alternative view of women to that expounded in the misogynist tradition. In the *Trois Vertus*, by contrast, Christine appears to conform to the dominant ideology of her time, instructing women of all estates in the duties appropriate to their particular station in life, recommending patience and humility to wives, modesty and obedience to virgins, and courage and dignity to widows. Sheila Delany thus laments the fact that in the *Trois Vertus* Christine fails to use the opportunity to challenge the restrictive range of roles which her society allowed to women,⁸ whilst Roberta Krueger concludes that the *Trois Vertus* merely teaches its readers 'to conform to a conservative sexual and moral ethic that reinforces the status quo of the class and gender hierarchies'.⁹

Here it will be argued that the gap between the *Trois Vertus* and the *Cité*, either in terms of their didactic aims or of their presentation of models for the female reader to follow, is not as great as such critics as Delany and Krueger have made out. In particular, when we compare the closing chapters of the *Cité* with the opening chapters of the *Trois Vertus*, the continuities between the two texts become clear. Christine the protagonist emerges in the course of the *Cité* as the victorious builder of a city designed to protect and celebrate the female sex, a marked contrast with the fearful, melancholy creature, racked by doubt as to women's worth, with which we were presented at the start of the text. In a direct address to her readers at the end of the *Cité*, Christine stresses that whilst the building is now complete, it is not closed in the sense of being sealed, for it has the capacity to admit ever more deserving cases inside: 'or est du tout achevee et parfaite nostre cité, en laquelle a grant honnour vous toutes celles qui amez vertus, gloire et loz povez estre hebergees, tant les passees dames, commes les presentes et celles a avenir, car pour toute dame honnourable est faite et fondee' (*Cité*,

⁷ See, for example, Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, 'Mère nature et le devoir social: la mère et l'enfant dans l'œuvre de Christine de Pizan', *Revue Historique* 282,1 (1990-1), 29-44, 40, who astutely observes: 'Si les héroïnes de *La Cité* avaient observé les avis de "prudence mondaine" qui inspire le second ouvrage, l'histoire n'aurait pas retenu leurs noms.'

⁸ Delany, '“Mothers”'.

⁹ Roberta L. Krueger, 'A woman's response: Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre du Duc des Vrais Amans* and the limits of romance', in her *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 217-46, 236.

1031). In this passage, Christine not only addresses the readers of the present text, but also anticipates the structure of her future work, the *Trois Vertus*, for she ends the *Cité* by providing advice for her female contemporaries in accordance with their marital status, a key criterion by which they will be ordered in the *Trois Vertus*. She offers to each category of women a condensed version of the much fuller instruction which they will receive in the later text: wives are encouraged to accept their lot with patience, whether they have the good fortune to have a kind husband or the misfortune to be married to a brutish churl (ibid., 1032–3); virgins are exhorted to behave with modesty and to guard against the loss of their honour (ibid., 1034); and widows are comforted and advised to adopt restrained dress and demeanour (ibid.). Christine then indicates that her remarks are meant to be relevant to women of all classes, although she does not here differentiate them according to their precise socio-economic estate as she will do in the *Trois Vertus*, simply calling on all members of the female sex ‘soyent grandes, moyennes et petites’ (ibid.) to protect themselves against those who seek to attack their honour and their chastity. For Christine, the virtuous deeds which give women access to her City can act as a positive refutation of misogynist slander: ‘Voyez mes dames, comment ses hommes vous accusent de tant de vices de toutes pars. Faictes les tous menteurs par monstrier vostre vertu et prouvés mençongeurs ceulx qui vous blasment par bien faire’ (ibid., 1034–5). In the *Cité*, as in the *Dieu d’Amours*, Christine identifies women’s enemies as those men who are, paradoxically, both misogynist detractors of women and their would-be seducers. She implores all women to be wary of falling into the snares of ‘fol’amor’, since to fall prey to men’s lustful propositions not only leads to compromising one’s honour and reputation but, still worse, provides seducer/detractors with the fodder needed for their accusations against the female sex: ‘Souviengne vous, chieres dames, comment ces hommes vous appellent fraillles, legieres et tost tournees; et comment toutesvoyes ylz quierent tous engins estranges et decepvables a grans paines et travaulx pour vous prendre, si que on fait les bestes aux laz’ (ibid., 1035).

All of these points set out at the end of the *Cité* are reiterated in the dedication and prologue of the *Trois Vertus*, thus explicitly stressing the continuity of the two projects. However, the opening sections of the *Trois Vertus* also serve to outline several of the key ideas which were to be developed more fully in the text by Christine.

The same three allegorical Virtues who caused Christine to build the original City once again visit their amanuensis, who is presented not in a state of despair, as she was at the beginning of the *Cité*, but of exhaustion, having just completed her previous labours of composition. The Virtues upbraid Christine for appearing to have stopped when, in fact, she is only half way through her task (8, lines 21–2). Since the City is now complete, Christine must strive to increase the number of its inhabitants. The image which the Virtues use to describe Christine's new role, that of a birdcatcher laying snares for women to lure them into the cage of the City, is an ironic echo of the image of the traps ('laz') laid by misogynist slanderers cited at the end of the *Cité*.¹⁰ Whereas these traps set by men have only a malevolent purpose, Christine's methods are benevolent 'neux d'amours' (ibid., line 41) since they lead to the good of women's souls and not their perdition. The purpose of entrapping women in this fashion is not to exploit their predicament, as do those misogynist writers who compose and circulate slanderous texts about them, but to enable women to produce their own 'song', one inspired by the deeds of their virtuous fellow dwellers in the City: 'que toutes . . . soyent ficees en la cage de nostre glorieuse cité, ou le doulz chant apprennent de celles qui desja y sont hebergees comme souveraines, et qui sans cesser deschantent *alliluya* avec la teneur des beneuréz angelz' (9, lines 46–50). As we shall see, this metaphor of women as creators of their own song anticipates one of the major themes of the *Trois Vertus*, namely the need to empower women by encouraging them to construct the meaning of their lives for themselves rather than allowing slanderers to do so for them.

The three Virtues go on to explain to Christine the structure of the new work which she is to write: though addressed to all women, its most illustrious addressee is the princess, whose reputation is the most important as she should act as a 'mirouer et exemple de toutes bonnes meurs', a model for all other members of her sex (ibid., lines 65–6). The mirror image employed here announces another important tenet of this text: as a 'mirror for women', the *Trois Vertus* aims

¹⁰ See Liliane Dulac, 'The representation and functions of feminine speech in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des Trois Vertus*', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 13–22, 13, who argues that 'the cage serves as a place where women will learn about speech and its powers'. See also Carol F. Heffernan, 'The bird-snare figure and the love quest of the *Romance of the Rose*', in Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor, eds., *The Spirit of the Court (Selected Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Toronto, 1983)* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 179–84.

to inspire its readers to imitate virtuous forms of behaviour which they should then disseminate by their own deeds, an ethical ideal which Christine had already applied in her earlier 'mirrors for men', the *Othéa* and the *Avision*. The princess to whom Christine dedicates the *Trois Vertus*, Marguerite de Bourgogne, the newly married bride of the French dauphin, Louis de Guyenne, is presented as the embodiment of these ideals because her virtue has already begun to make itself manifest and to enhance her reputation: 'pour ce que le tesmoing et rapport de tous et celles qui frequentent entour vous notiffie que vostre tres belle joennece florissant de mieulx et mieulx . . . se demonstre par les signes de vertu qui en vous apperent' (3, emphasis added).¹¹ This emphasis on virtuous behaviour which is visible for all to see constitutes a key theme underlying the advice delivered to women in the *Trois Vertus*, a theme which illustrates one of the main ways in which Christine puts an orthodox idea to novel purposes.

In a direct echo of her address to all future readers at the end of the *Cité*, Christine goes on to explain here in the *Trois Vertus* that her aim is not only to provide instruction for her royal patron, but also to seek the 'accroissement du bien et honneur de toute femme, grande, moyenne et petite' (ibid., emphasis added). One final element of the dedication seals the link between the two texts: just as the *Cité* began with the intervention of Dame Reason to bring the despairing Christine back to reason, so the *Trois Vertus* is intended for those readers who wish to live and learn according to their rational faculties, 'par l'ordre et administracion de raison' (ibid.). This emphasis on rational choice in determining the significance of one's own life is fundamental to Christine's teaching in the *Trois Vertus*, and indeed, to her defence of women as a whole, a defence based on the premise that females are as capable of rational thought and behaviour as their male counterparts.

These opening sections of the *Trois Vertus* alert the reader to the chief elements of its instruction: the call to women to produce their own 'song', to act as a mirror of virtues, and to exercise their rationality to the full. Thus Christine herself stresses how the *Trois Vertus* continues the project of the *Cité* and that the two works have the shared aim of inculcating virtue in the female reader. Those modern critics who have dismissed the *Trois Vertus* as conservative in

¹¹ There are no line references for quotations from the dedication of the *Trois Vertus*, as the editors do not provide any line numbering for these pages.

comparison with the *Cité* have missed the point that Christine saw this later work as playing a major role in her critique of misogyny by providing a coherent set of moral principles which would help to 'liberate' her female readers from anti-feminist attack.

Where the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus* do differ is not in terms of their didactic aims but rather of their methods. The former proceeds by commemorating the great deeds that women have performed and also by translating those deeds into moral qualities that Christine's readers should imitate: as she herself acknowledges at the end of the *Cité*, the lives of her contemporaries are not the same as those of mythological or even many historical figures. In the *Trois Vertus*, where Christine switches genre from catalogue to courtesy book, she encourages her readers to 'enter' the City of Ladies not by the use of *exempla* but by the inculcation of moral and practical precepts. In placing her courtesy book for female readers within the wider context of her defence of women, Christine marks a significant break with other works in the same genre by male contemporaries such as the Chevalier de La Tour Landry¹² and the Menagier de Paris. The advice which these authors offer to their intended readers (who were, respectively, minor noblewomen and a wealthy bourgeoisie) is designed to teach them that their best interest lies in being submissive and obedient to their husbands, thus reinforcing the misogynist view of women as childish, irrational creatures who must be placed under male control.¹³ In the *Trois Vertus*, where Christine addresses women across a wide range of social roles, from princesses to prostitutes and from nuns to artisans,¹⁴ she treats *all* her readers as rational beings who, whilst accepting their inferior position in social

¹² See Didier Lett, 'Comment parler à ses filles?', *Médiévales* 19 (1990), 77–82; Anne-Marie de Gendt, 'Sens et fonction du prologue dans *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 95,2 (1994), 193–206.

¹³ For comparative studies of the *Trois Vertus* and other courtesy books, see Liliane Dulac, 'Inspiration mystique et savoir politique: les conseils aux veuves chez Francesco da Barberino et chez Christine de Pizan', in *Mélanges à la mémoire de Franco Simone: France et Italie dans la culture européenne, 1: Moyen Age et Renaissance*, Bibliothèque Franco Simone, 4 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1980), 113–41; Joan B. Williamson, 'Philippe de Mézières' book for married ladies: a book from the entourage of the court of Charles VI', in Burgess and Taylor, *The Spirit of the Court*, 393–408; Charity Cannon Willard, 'Women and marriage around 1400: three views', *Fifteenth Century Studies* 17 (1990), 475–84; Ann J. Kettle, '"Fit and proper behaviour": didactic literature addressed to women in the later Middle Ages', *Women's History Notebooks* 3,1 (1996), 14–21; Roberta L. Krueger, '*Chascune selon son estat*: Women's education and social class in the conduct books of Christine de Pizan and Anne de France', *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 24,46 (1997), 19–34.

¹⁴ See Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, 'Le *Livre des Trois Vertus* et le *sermo ad status*', in Dulac and Ribémont, *Une femme*, 135–50.

and political terms, can nonetheless prove their *moral* equality with men by being taught to control their own behaviour and desires. If we examine three key areas of women's experience which Christine discusses in the *Trois Vertus*, we shall see how she not only refutes the latent misogyny of the approach adopted by the Chevalier and the Menagier in their courtesy books but also challenges more explicit forms of anti-feminist doctrine such as those contained in both clerical works and courtly texts like Jean de Meung's *Rose*. This chapter will analyse how Christine teaches her readers first, to save their souls; secondly, to construct a worthy reputation for themselves; and thirdly, to avoid conforming to the anti-feminist literary stereotype of woman as fickle adulteress.¹⁵ In each of these areas – spiritual, practical and amorous – Christine's explicit aim in the *Trois Vertus* is to appeal to women's own self-interest by persuading them to lead a virtuous life which will shield them from the attacks of misogynist slanderers.

SUCCOURING THE SOUL: PIETY AND RATIONALITY

Although by far the longest passage of religious instruction delivered in the *Trois Vertus* is placed in the section devoted specifically to the princess, it is made clear from the very start of the text that this instruction is meant to be applicable to the female sex as a whole: 'Savoir faisons que comme amour charitable nous contraingne a desirer le bien et accroissement de l'onneur et prospérité de *l'université des femmes* et a vouloir le decheement et destruction de toutes les choses qui y pourroyent empeschier, sommes meues a vous declairier et dire paroles de doctrine' (10, lines 9–13, emphasis added). Christine's undertaking to provide appropriate spiritual teaching for all manner of women is in line with clerical writers such as Humbert de Romans who, in their *sermones ad status*, treated women as a separate group from men and distinguished them according to their socio-economic condition and marital status.¹⁶ However, in addressing women as an estate, such sermons tended to reinforce misogyny-

¹⁵ See Allison Kelly, 'Christine de Pizan and Antoine de la Sale: the dangers of love in theory and fiction', in Richards, *Reinterpreting*, 173–86.

¹⁶ See D. L. d'Avray and M. Tausche, 'Marriage sermons in *ad status* collections of the central Middle Ages', *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 47 (1980), 71–119, 74, n. 9, who observe that Humbert de Romans was one of the few theologians to have addressed prostitutes in his *ad status* collections of sermons.

nist stereotypes by attributing specific vices to the female sex.¹⁷ Similarly, works by Christine's male lay contemporaries, such as the courtesy books of the Chevalier and the Menagier and misogynous tracts such as Eustache Deschamps's *Miroir de mariage*,¹⁸ echo clerical anti-feminism in their view of women as being prone to sin because of their essentially bodily nature. Christine in the *Trois Vertus* thus has a double agenda. On the one hand, she encourages women of whatever estate to live devoutly by prescribing degrees of piety which could be achieved within her readers' daily lives. On the other hand, the spiritual instruction with which she provides her readers offers an implicit challenge to two key areas of medieval misogyny. First, Christine addresses the problem of the dichotomy between body and soul and refutes the well-worked misogynist alignment of woman with the former and man with the latter. Secondly, she implicitly rejects the anti-feminist view that women are inferior to men in terms of their rationality by presenting her readers with reasoned arguments as to why they should seek salvation rather than opting simply to frighten them into virtue with threatening cautionary tales.

The *Trois Vertus* can be seen to be part of a general tendency in the later Middle Ages towards the pursuit of a spiritual ideal which, in contrast to monasticism, could be more readily accommodated into the lives of lay people.¹⁹ The text deals with the question of how to conquer the weaknesses of the flesh by proposing that the reader could adopt a life either of contemplative devotion, which would involve taking religious orders and withdrawing from the world, or of active devotion, which would mean performing acts of piety and charity whilst still living in the world. Each of these ways of living is evaluated in terms of the liberation which it can offer women's souls from the strictures of the body. In line with orthodox teaching, the *Trois Vertus* presents the contemplative life as that state which requires the greatest degree of detachment from bodily ties: 'la personne qui y est aime tant et si ardemment Nostre Seigneur que elle oublie entierement pere, mere, enfans, tout le monde et soy

¹⁷ Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London/New York: Routledge, 1983), 3.

¹⁸ For an edition of this text see Eustache Deschamps, *Miroir de Mariage*, in *Ceuvres complètes*, ed. Gaston Raynaud, vol. 9 (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1894).

¹⁹ See Hilary M. Carey, 'Devout laypeople and the pursuit of the mixed life in later medieval England', *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1986–7), 361–81; André Vauchez, *Les Laïcs au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987).

meismes, pour la tres grant et embrasee entente que elle a sans cesser a son Createur' (23, lines 8–12). This life simultaneously provides maximum freedom from corporeality, thus allowing the nearest experience to beatitude that can be obtained on earth: 'il est escript de pluseurs saints et saintes contemplatifs qui ont esté veus quant ilz estoient en leur contemplacion eslevéz dessus terre tres hault par miracle de Dieu, si que il sembloit que le corps voulsist suivre la pensee qui montee estoit ou ciel' (24, lines 37–40). The active life, on the other hand, involves transcendence of the body by a different route: that of desiring the good of others rather than attempting to seek God directly (*ibid.*, lines 53–5). Whilst acknowledging the superiority of the contemplative over the active life, the *Trois Vertus* nonetheless attempts to offer its readers a solution which takes into account women's need to seek salvation whilst living in the world, most usually as wives and mothers. It is therefore significant that only one chapter of Christine's text is given over to the religious, because, as the Virtues explain, such women have already elected to follow the contemplative path. For all others, the *Trois Vertus* advocates a 'mixed life' which combines elements of both the contemplative, such as prayers, and of the active, such as almsgiving. In accordance with doctrinal texts such as the 'Journées Chrétiennes'²⁰ or the *ad status* writings of her clerical contemporary Jean Gerson, Christine's erstwhile ally in the 'querelle', whose recommendations to his five lay sisters emphasise both private devotion and virtuous public conduct,²¹ the *Trois Vertus* provides the princess in particular with a description of a typical day during which her behaviour should adhere to the ideals of a 'mixed life' of contemplation and action.²² The princess should combine devotion and virtuous deeds, for she should observe as many of the hours of worship as possible whilst still finding time for charitable action in the form of almsgiving. Even mundane moments of the day should

²⁰ See Geneviève Hasenohr, 'La vie quotidienne de la femme vue par l'église: l'enseignement des "Journées Chrétiennes" de la fin du moyen âge', *Frau und Spätmittelalterlicher Alltag (Internationaler Kongress Krems an der Donau, 2. bis 5. Oktober, 1984)*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 473. Band: Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs, nr. 9 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 19–101.

²¹ See 'Sur l'excellence de la virginité', 'Neuf considérations' and 'Onze ordonnances' in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7,1, no. 337, 416–421; no. 292, 1–3; and no. 298, 55–7, respectively. See also Edmond Vansteenbergh, 'Trois règlements de vie de Gerson pour ses sœurs', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 14 (1934), 191–218.

²² See Lorcín, 'Trois Vertus'.

be enlivened by moral teachings: at the dinner table, for example, 'aura un preudomme . . . qui dira dictié d'anciennes gestes des bons trespaséz, ou d'aucunes bonnes moralitéz ou exemples' (50, lines 81–4). If such a model is followed, the princess is sure of having spent her time in 'bonne et sainte activeté' (51, line 114).

Although the courtesy books of Christine's male contemporaries lack any detailed discussion of the contemplative versus the active life, they too try to take account of the demands placed on women in their daily existence. The *Menagier* in particular reveals his compassion by encouraging his young wife to wake and say her prayers at matins, whilst stating that she need not actually rise at that early hour of the day (*Menagier*, 6). The Chevalier is equally aware of the need for women to lead a 'mixed life', though he places more emphasis than Christine does on strict forms of private devotion such as fasting up to three times a week (*Chevalier*, 14–16, 16–18), and saying one's hours (*ibid.*, 10–11), rather than on performing public acts of charity as part of a daily routine.

In stressing the need for women to transcend their bodily weakness through pursuit of the 'mixed life', Christine in the *Trois Vertus* is indebted to the orthodox Augustinian view that for both men and women the major impediment to saving one's soul is the body, whose burning desires and pleasures lead the soul away from God. However, she would seem to be aware that misogynists had exploited this argument in order to claim that women's nature was more essentially corporeal than that of men, which meant that they had a greater propensity to sin.²³ In order to dissuade their male clerical audience from having illicit or even marital commerce with the female sex, writers and preachers would stress the transient nature of women's beauty using an image of the female body as a mere mass of flesh which was subject to decay, as in the following example from the *Miroir de mariage*:

Et que devendra elle en l'eure?
Viande a vers et a serpens,
Et pis ancor, si com je pens:
Le couleuvres son coul prandront
Et les serpens l'alaitteront;
Plus ara esté tendre et aise,

²³ See Elizabeth Robertson, 'The corporeality of female sanctity in *The Life of St Margaret*', in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 268–87.

Plus sera pourrie et punaise
 Sa charoingne, et plus corrompue,
 Et las couvendra que plus pue:
 Elle souffrira en la terre.

(*Miroir de mariage*, lines 5889–97)²⁴

By emphasising the physicality of women and thereby reinforcing the gendering of body and soul,²⁵ such writers placed responsibility on women for the temptations facing men's souls, rather than directly addressing the problem posed by men's own bodies and desires. Christine offers a challenge to these misogynist views of women by re-using this same image of the body as a 'sac, qui est viande a vers et vaissel de toute iniquité' (18, lines 118–19), but stressing that this is part of the human condition to which both women *and* men are subject. She makes it clear that the female body is not presented here as a problem for men, but rather as a problem for the woman herself, since it is her soul, not the man's, which is at stake. Unlike the anti-feminist tendency to identify the female sex solely with the flesh, women are seen in Christine's text as fully human, endowed with both a body and a soul and thus no different from men in being earthly creatures who must strive to attain salvation. She emphasises this point by reminding her readers, and the princess in particular, that if they give in to the temptations of the flesh they will be punished, just like those notable examples of men of the past who were brought down by their bodily desires: 'As tu oublié comme Nostre Seigneur puni par son orgueil Nabugodnozor, qui estoit roy de Babiloine . . . ? Semblablement le grant roy de Perse, Anthiocus, et aussi l'empereur Xerces, et grant nombre d'aultres' (19, lines 151–5). Christine's consistent strategy is to undo the misogynist equation of women with the body and instead to stress the common humanity of both sexes, a strategy which she employs throughout her defence of women. Although the *Trois Vertus* is a very pragmatic book, in its treatment of religious matters Christine's insistence on the similarities rather than the differences

²⁴ See Laura Kendrick, 'Transgression, contamination, and woman in Eustache Deschamps's *Miroir de Mariage*', *Stanford French Review* 14,1/2 (1990), 211–30. On the treatment of women in sermons see Jean Longère, *Œuvres oratoires de maîtres parisiens au XIIIe siècle: étude historique et doctrinale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1975), vol. 1, 398–403.

²⁵ See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), 3–29.

between men and women parallels that found in the works of female mystics of the later Middle Ages. As Caroline Walker Bynum has observed: 'A careful and comparative reading of texts by male and female authors from the twelfth to the fifteenth century thus suggests that it is men who develop conceptions of gender, whereas women develop conceptions of humanity.'²⁶

Christine breaks not only with the explicit misogyny of clerics and misogynous writers such as Deschamps but also with the more implicit misogyny of male-authored courtesy books for women such as the *Menagier* and the *Chevalier*. The relentlessly didactic mode used in these texts would seem to be indebted to the misogynist view that women are less rational beings than men since, despite the relatively high level of literacy enjoyed by the women for whom the *Chevalier* and the *Menagier* were writing,²⁷ they both treat their addressees as merely passive receivers of their wisdom. The *Chevalier*, for example, teaches his readers primarily through the use of threats,²⁸ frightening them with biblical and homiletic *exempla* similar to those found in contemporary collections of sermons.²⁹ The tales he recounts are popular stories of hellfire, jeering devils and supernatural apparitions, such as that of the hermit who sees his chattering female audience surrounded by demons: 'Ces ennemis sailloient sur leurs cornes, sur leurs riches atours et sur leurs cointises, aussi come petiz oiselez, qui saillent de branche en branche' (*Chevalier*, 63). Other, even more lurid stories depict episodes such as devils showing their backsides to women, and couples fornicating openly in church which, though clearly intended as *exempla in malo*, paradoxically caused the *Chevalier*'s book to be dismissed by its late nineteenth-century readership as obscene!³⁰ The instruction delivered by the *Menagier*, whilst avoiding the

²⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, '... And woman his humanity': female imagery in the religious writing of the later Middle Ages', in her *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 151–80, 156.

²⁷ See Malcolm B. Parkes, 'The literacy of the laity', in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby, eds., *Literature and Western Civilisation*, 6 vols., *The Medieval World*, vol. 2 (London: Aldus Books, 1973), 555–78; Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. M. M. Postan (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 76–88; Joan M. Ferrante, 'The education of women in the Middle Ages in theory, fact, and fantasy', in Patricia H. Labalme, ed., *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York University Press, 1980), 9–42; Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, 137–80; Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 154–61, 186–9, 214–17. See also Susan Groag Bell, 'Medieval women book owners: arbiters of lay piety and ambassadors of culture', *Signs* 7, 4 (1982), 742–68.

²⁸ Kettle, '“Fit and proper behaviour”', 14.

²⁹ *Chevalier*, xxxii. ³⁰ Lett, 'Comment parler', 77.

Chevalier's extensive use of hair-raising *exempla*, simply provides his young wife with a straightforward account of the prayers to be said at appropriate hours and a manual for confession, using orthodox descriptions of the seven deadly sins and the seven opposite virtues (*Menagier*, 6–46).³¹ Yet, like the Chevalier, the *Menagier* too treats his addressee as a being of limited rationality since, instead of encouraging her to distinguish for herself between good and evil, he indoctrinates her with lists of the different vices and virtues, as in the following example: 'Et ce pechié de luxure si a .vi. branches: la premiere si est quant un homme pense a une femme ou la femme a l'omme: et la personne a en telle pensee grant plaisance, et s'i delictie grandement et y demeure longuement; et par longue demeure la char s'esmeust a delectation' (ibid., 37).

When we compare the spiritual instruction offered by the *Trois Vertus* with that proposed by the *Chevalier* and the *Menagier*, we can see that Christine consistently appeals to her female readers to exercise their own rationality when looking to the good of their souls. The *Trois Vertus* advocates the 'mixed life' and the more general pursuit of virtue to all women, delivering this lesson to its readers according to their specific station in life, in line with orthodox *artes predicandi* which stipulate the need to adjust the style of a sermon to suit a particular audience.³² Although Christine adopts a more didactic tone with women of the lowest social categories, such as the peasantry, than that which she employs with the princess and other noblewomen,³³ this does not mean that it is only those who are high-born whom Christine deems capable of exercising rationality. Indeed, even when addressing prostitutes, the most reviled of all social groups, she uses a set of simplified but reasoned arguments by which to convince such women that their spiritual interests would be best served by abandoning their immoral lifestyle. Presenting these arguments in the form of a brief Socratic dialogue, Christine offers a series of answers to the objections put forward by a hypothetical prostitute who would like to change her life but feels unable to do so. For example, Christine retorts that 'La tierce raison, qui est que elle

³¹ On the *Menagier*'s sources for his moral and spiritual instruction, see *Menagier*, xxx–xxxix; Georgine E. Brereton, 'Deux sources du *Menagier de Paris*: *Le Roman des sept sages de Rome* et *Les Moralitez sur le jeu des échés*', *Romania* 74 (1953), 338–57; Janet M. Ferrier, "'Seulement pour vous endoctriner': the author's use of *exempla* in *Le Menagier de Paris*", *Medium Aevum* 48 (1979), 77–89.

³² See Henri Martin, *Le Métier de prédicateur à la fin du Moyen Age: 1350–1520* (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

³³ Lorcin, '*Trois Vertus*'.

n'aroit de quoy vivre, ne vaut neant: car se elle a corps fort et poissant pour mal faire et pour souffrir males nuis, bateures et assez de mescheances, elle l'aroit a bien gagner sa vie; mais que ainsi fust disposee comme nous disons' (214, lines 85–90). However, it is in the lengthy sections devoted to the princess that Christine most clearly demonstrates women's capacity for making rational choices and thus their full humanity.³⁴

In their opening invocation to the princess, the Virtues use direct discourse, emphasising that their teaching is addressed to her reason, and inviting her to take her place in their 'escole de Sapience' (10, line 14). This invitation nonetheless requires a certain pre-condition: that the princess humble herself, since 'qui se humiliera sera exaucié' (ibid., line 17), a lesson which Christine had earlier delivered to the prince in the *Avision* where she offered herself as an example of humility. This pre-condition is, in fact, one of the key steps of the teaching which follows in the *Trois Vertus*, for the princess must learn to make herself as humble in spirit as are the poor, who are meek before God.

From direct address, the text shifts to using a simplified form of psychomachia with which to dramatise the princess's struggle to save her soul. In contrast to the unremitting flow of *exempla* in the *Chevalier*, Christine's use of psychomachia functions not only to provide a dramatic approach but also to reveal, step by step, the rational processes involved in deciding upon a virtuous course of action. The princess is addressed, in turn, by 'temptacion' (12–13), 'amour et crainte de Nostre Seigneur' (14–20) and 'Sainte Information' (27–8). Each of the discourses put forward by these three allegorical abstractions works either to conceal from or to reveal to the princess the nature of her predicament, one which the implied princely reader of the *Avision* also had to face and which is presented here in the same Aristotelian terms: how to resolve the discrepancy between the 'accident' of one's high estate and the 'essence' of one's lowly human soul. The figure of 'temptacion' aims to conceal from the princess her true spiritual state, and so speaks to her only in terms of her worldly welfare by appealing to her senses rather than to her reason. With the words of a skilled flatterer, 'temptacion'

³⁴ In this respect, Christine would seem to be drawing on Augustine's assessment of women's rationality, which is more positive than that given by other patristic authorities. See Jean A. Truax, 'Augustine of Hippo: defender of women's equality?', *Journal of Medieval History* 16,4 (1990), 279–99.

emphasises the princess's high position of authority and claims that she should regard herself as immune to criticisms from others, painting a picture of all that the princess is free to do – a picture which is, in fact, an account of the seven deadly sins. Significantly, because the discourse of 'temptacion' proceeds by subterfuge, these sins are not named, or even presented as such. For example, the princess's pride is implicitly appealed to when she is urged to consider herself 'plus riche, ou plus haultement enlignagee, ou plus prisiee pour tes enfans, plus crainte et plus renommee et auctorisiee pour la poissance de ton seigneur' (12, lines 16–18). The overall lesson delivered by 'temptacion' is that, thanks to the authority of her rank, the princess is accountable to no-one but herself and that her public reputation is unassailable: 'Qu'as tu a faire se on en parle? Tieulx parleurs ne te peuent grever' (ibid., lines 36–7).

In order to combat the pernicious views put forward by 'temptacion', 'amour de Nostre Seigneur' takes up the fight for the princess by appealing to her reason and arguing that she must learn to put the welfare of her soul before the accidental privileges of her noble birth. Whereas 'temptacion' flattered the princess's pride in her social standing, 'amour' derides her mistaken belief in the importance of her elevated state, which constitutes merely a superficial difference between herself and other human beings: 'Quel avantage as tu, ne que un aultre? Neant plus que aroit un tas de terre couvert d'un parement de cellui qui seroit soubz une povre flossoye' (14, lines 13–15). If 'temptacion' sought to reassure the princess with a promise of immunity from criticism, 'amour' reminds her that all her actions will be subject to God's scrutiny (15, line 26). Far from exalting the princess's high status, 'amour' decries her position, explaining that poverty would actually be more beneficial for her soul. Indeed, as 'amour' proceeds to argue, the predicament facing the princess is identical to that of the rich man in the parable of the camel and the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24). By privileging the advantages of this world over the eternal benefits of the next, the princess runs the risk of acting irrationally and excluding herself from heaven: 'Mais ce fait le grant orgueil qui, pour cause de ces vains honneurs ou tu te vois enveloppee, estaint en toy si toute raison que il semble que tu ne cuides mie seulement estre princepce ou grant dame, mais si comme une droicte deesse en ce monde' (ibid., lines 35–9, emphasis added). In order to explain the significance of the lesson given by 'temptacion', which aimed to seduce the princess

into indulging in all the excesses which her rank can afford her, 'amour' provides a gloss to such unseemly behaviour, explicitly naming the sins which the princess was being encouraged to commit as 'orgueil', 'yre', 'amasser tresor' (avarice), envy, 'oysiveté', 'lecherie' (gluttony) and 'charnalité' (15–18). Furthermore, whilst 'temptacion' painted an individualistic picture of the princess's existence, as if she could live outside all moral codes and simply obey her own desires, 'amour' is at pains to remind her of those Christian values which should, in fact, determine her moral choices and actions. 'Amour' therefore quotes St Bernard on the dangers of sloth (17) and gives biblical and classical examples of pride such as Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus and Xerxes (19). This intervention ends with a reminder to the princess of how slight her accidental advantages really are in the divine scheme of things: if proud, powerful men have been brought down by God, she should be all the more afraid since, as a woman, she possesses no intrinsic earthly powers of her own (20, lines 168–71).

In keeping with the process of 'staging' the princess's dilemma in order to reveal to her that she possesses free will and has the potential to be an example of rational behaviour for others, the princess is next shown deliberating on the opposing sets of views which she has just received from 'temptacion' and 'amour'. This deliberation, presented in the form of a dialogue with herself, leads her to recognise the vital difference between satisfying the temporary desires of the body in this world and striving to ensure the salvation of her soul in the next life. The princess describes earthly existence as an endless process of constantly increased desire, 'plus tu te ficheras es delices du monde et plus te survendra de divers desirs' (20, lines 13–14), which leads, after death, to a state of perpetual absence, 'estre privee a tousjours sans fin de la vision de Dieu' (21, lines 21–2). By contrast, moderation of one's bodily desires in this world leads to the soul's perpetual gratification, expressed as presence: 'estre assovy de tous desirs' (ibid., line 41).

It is 'Sainte Informacion', the final agent in the psychomachia, who provides the princess with the solution to her problem of how to resolve the contradiction between the temptations offered by her social position and her wish to pursue virtue for the good of her soul. She must respect the basic precepts of both the contemplative and the active lives, adapting them to her own circumstances in order to lead a 'mixed life'. 'Sainte Informacion' therefore outlines for the

princess principles of virtuous behaviour which will combat the sins that she might otherwise be tempted to commit. Instead of pride she must seek humility, instead of wrath, patience, and so on. Most importantly, the princess is told to perform virtuous actions which are publicly visible, such as making peace between the prince, his barons and his people, and bringing relief and comfort to the poor (32–41). It is specifically in performing the last of these functions that the princess proves herself to be most worthy of praise as a rational being whose decision to pursue virtue can act as an inspiration to others:

Et ainsi la princepe ou grande maistresse en ce faisant acquiert plus grant merite que une mendre en cas semblable ne feroit pour trois principaulz raisons: la premiere est que de tant que la personne est plus grant et plus se humilie, plus croist sa bonté; la seconde, que elle donne plus grant reconfort aux povres, si comme dit est; et la tierce, qui n'est mie petite raison, que elle donne bon exemple a ceulx et celles qui la voyent faire telle oeuvre et si grant humilité. (38, lines 55–62)

By shifting from direct discourse delivered by the authoritative voice of the three Virtues to that offered by the personifications in the psychomachia and thence to the dialogue of the beleaguered princess with herself, the *Trois Vertus* demonstrates the various stages involved in exercising one's free will and rationality.³⁵ Moreover, the lesson delivered to the princess underlines her similarity with other women as a lowly human soul and thus proposes her as a model for all womankind, exhorting her to become a visible *exemplum* of all virtues.

The spiritual instruction which Christine delivers in the *Trois Vertus* illustrates the two-fold nature of her project in this text: to offer her readers a practical method for pursuing virtue in their daily lives, and to conduct a defence of women as creatures who, like men, are subject to temptation but are capable of conquering the desires of the flesh and of making rational choices in order to safeguard the well-being of their souls. Yet, far from simply challenging specific points of clerical anti-feminism in the *Trois Vertus*, Christine in fact sets out for her female readers a complete design for living which will enable them to reduce the partisans of misogyny to silence.

³⁵ This emphasis on reason as opposed to faith alone is also derived from Augustine: see Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, *Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories* (Princeton University Press, 1963), 8.

PRACTICAL MORALITY AND THE 'POLITICS OF VISIBILITY'

If the first type of teaching delivered to women in the *Trois Vertus* addresses the problem of how to ensure the soul's salvation, its second set of lessons, proffered by the more worldly allegorical figure of Prudence Mondaine, is of a more practical kind, one aimed at encouraging the reader to practise virtue, to ensure her honour in this world and to confound anti-feminist opinion. Whilst all medieval thinkers agreed on the primacy of salvation in the next life, many writers did also emphasise the need to pursue a good reputation in this life. Numerous literary genres were devoted to recording the illustrious deeds of the famous and the virtuous, such as the panegyric catalogue tradition, the chronicle and works of hagiography.³⁶ Writers working within such genres enjoyed the power of determining the reputation of individuals and whether they would be remembered for the good or for the bad deeds which they had performed.³⁷ As Claude Gauvard has observed: 'Dans cette société du paraître, les hommes n'existent que par les yeux des autres et, par conséquent, par la réputation qui leur est faite.'³⁸ Gauvard goes on to make the important point that for men, their reputation was crucially dependent on those of the women with whom they were connected – their mothers, wives and daughters – such that adultery and cuckoldry would constitute a defamation of both his and their good names.³⁹ Princesses and queens in particular, sent to cement a political alliance through marriage with rulers of a foreign state, would find their morals and actions under the scrutiny of the court.⁴⁰ In addition to possible punishment for immoral behaviour, their reputations were at the mercy of court commentators such as chroniclers and poets.⁴¹ Notorious examples of queenly figures in

³⁶ See Ruth Morse, 'Medieval biography: history as a branch of literature', *Modern Language Review* 80.2 (1985), 257–68; Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Fama et les preux: nom et renom à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Médiévales* 24 (1993), 35–44.

³⁷ See Joël Blanchard, 'Les entrées royales: pouvoir et représentation du pouvoir à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Littérature* 50 (1983), 3–14; Charity Cannon Willard, 'L'entrée du poète dans le champ politique au XVe siècle', *Annales ESC* 41 (1986), 43–61.

³⁸ Claude Gauvard, 'La Fama, une parole fondatrice', *Médiévales* 24 (1993), 5–14, 11.

³⁹ See Philippa Maddern, 'Honour among the Pastons: gender and integrity in fifteenth-century English provincial society', *Journal of Medieval History* 14.4 (1988), 357–71.

⁴⁰ See Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), 7.

⁴¹ See Charles T. Wood, 'Queens, queans and kingship: an inquiry into theories of royal legitimacy in late medieval England and France', in William C. Jordan *et al.*, eds., *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1976), 385–400.

the late Middle Ages whose scandalous conduct brought them both opprobrium and reproof include Isabella of France, wife of Edward II, and Christine's own contemporary, Isabeau de Bavière, wife of Charles VI.⁴² Noblewomen too could be punished for unchaste conduct, particularly adultery, of which the most famous example is that of the married daughters of Countess Mahaut d'Artois who were accused in 1314 of having affairs with knights at court and subsequently disgraced.⁴³

The question of a woman's reputation is certainly central to courtesy books such as the *Chevalier* and the *Menagier*, although the emphasis placed on her 'renommee' as an individual, or as a wife and mother, differs markedly between these two texts. The *Chevalier* acknowledges that his daughters are about to enter a social arena which is judgmental, unforgiving and duplicitous: 'Car le monde est moult dangereux et moult envyeulx et merueilleux; car tel vous rit et vous fait bel devant qui par derriere s'en va bourdant' (*Chevalier*, Prologue, 4). He compares a woman's quest for her own individual good name with that of a knight seeking to show his valour, stressing that her efforts will be rewarded in both the public and private domains (ibid., 225–6). However, this individualistic outlook is somewhat negated by those stories the *Chevalier* recounts which show how a woman's good reputation is in fact acquired by obeying her husband's commands, no matter how ridiculous, out of fear of bringing shame upon *his* reputation in front of friends. Witness, for instance, the tale of the wife who mistook her husband's demand for salt, 'sel sur table', for the injunction to jump, 'saul sur table' (ibid., 41–4).

The *Menagier*, for his part, is solely concerned with teaching his wife that on her 'renommee' depends that of her husband, children and extended family. For example, he insists that even suspicion of misdoing by a woman can bring irreversible disgrace on herself and her family: 'Et veez en quel peril perpetuel une femme met son honneur et l'honneur du lignaige de son mary et de ses enfans' (*Menagier*, 55). Taking Griselda as his chief model of wifely obedience, the *Menagier* goes even further than the *Chevalier* in explaining to

⁴² See Hilda Johnstone, 'Isabella, the She-Wolf of France', *History* 21 (1936), 208–15; Jean Verdon, *Isabeau de Bavière* (Paris: Jules Tallandier, 1981); Jean Markale, *Isabeau de Bavière* (Paris: Payot, 1982); Sophia Menache, 'Isabelle of France, queen of England – a reconsideration', *Journal of Medieval History* 10,2 (1984), 107–24.

⁴³ Labarge, *A Small Sound*, 85.

his young spouse that in order to avoid causing her husband shame, she must obey his every command, whether she judges it to be reasonable or not: 'en tous cas, en tous termes, en tous lieux et en toutes saisons vous accomplissez sans redargucion tous ses commandemens quelxconques' (ibid., 77). He therefore rehearses numerous *exempla* of women who lost their own good names and harmed those of their husbands by their refusal to count to four without argument (ibid., 81), to leave a broom in the bedroom at night (ibid., 84–6), or even to jump over a stick (ibid., 86–7). In all of these instances, the Menagier appeals not to women's desire for their own good reputation but rather to their need for self-preservation since his message is that if a wife fails her husband, he will surely abandon her and find someone else (ibid., 89).

Compared with the treatment of female 'renommee' in contemporary works by male authors such as the Chevalier and the Menagier, Christine's text is unequivocal: it is the woman's own personal reputation, not that of her male kin, which is at stake. 'Renommee' in the *Trois Vertus* concerns any individual woman's potential to 'write' herself into the City of Ladies and so the text develops the idea that a woman must determine her own reputation for posterity, building on the metaphors of the 'song' and the self as a 'mirror' introduced in the opening chapters. For Christine, this necessity was all the more urgent given that the various genres in which female reputations had been established had for the most part been written by men. By virtue of their access to learning, it was male writers who possessed the power to determine how a woman who distinguished herself in any way from the general mass would be commemorated, as in the example of Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus*. Although the *Trois Vertus* may therefore disappoint modern critics for its failure to demand equal rights and opportunities for women, it was intended by Christine to empower its contemporary readers to determine that which *was* within the capacity of every member of the female sex to construct for herself: her reputation. In so doing, a woman could not only attempt to live a morally blameless existence, which was an issue of vital importance for Christine's medieval audience, but could also act as a living refutation of misogynist discourse.

Christine's key discussion of the question of 'renommee' appears in the opening remarks of Prudence Mondaine to the princess, remarks which are also meant for the ears of any other 'haulte dame'

(41, line 3).⁴⁴ This allegorical figure explains the close link between the spiritual teaching previously delivered by the three Virtues and the worldly instruction which she herself is about to give: both are concerned with the form of living – ‘maniere de vivre’ – which one must adopt in order to lead a virtuous existence (ibid., line 10). Whilst the good of the soul should be the princess’s main spiritual concern, the good of her honour and reputation is the most important of her earthly concerns: ‘sur toutes les choses de ce bas monde doit aimer honneur et bonne renommee’ (ibid., lines 12–14).

If the notion of a woman’s ‘renommee’ occupies a key place in Christine’s text, by what means is its reader supposed to forge such a reputation for herself? Here, the *Trois Vertus* is completely conventional in its view that a woman’s reputation is determined by her ability to curb the desires of the body and its potential for sin, and in its recommendation of sobriety and chastity as the chief virtues which a woman should cultivate.⁴⁵ Like the *Chevalier* and the *Menagier*, it upholds the view held by late medieval society that the woman’s main role was to ensure the legitimacy of her husband’s heirs. In common with the works of her male contemporaries, Christine’s text subdivides sobriety, the first of these virtues, into behavioural norms: moderation and restraint in dress, speech, manner, eating habits, spending, sleep and even reading matter: ‘Ceste dicte Sobrece se demonstrera en tous les sens de la dame aussi bien que es fais et habiz par dehors . . . Avec ceste Sobrece corrigera tellement et ordonnera la bouche et le parler de la dame’ (44, lines 88–9, 94–6).⁴⁶ In similar vein, the *Menagier* recommends that his wife should be ‘honnestement vestue sans induire nouvelles devises et sans trop ou peu de beuban’ (*Menagier*, 9), and that her speech

⁴⁴ This advice is also offered to noblewomen (123, lines 46–50) and bourgeois (173, lines 54–6).

⁴⁵ See Kelso, *Doctrine*; Bornstein, *The Lady*.

⁴⁶ See Georges Duby and Philippe Braunstein, ‘The emergence of the individual’, in Georges Duby and Philippe Ariès, eds., Arthur Goldhammer, trans., *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass./London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 507–632, 574, who argue: ‘Whether sumptuous or simply convenient, clothing was an intimate matter, as evidenced by the space devoted to it in the records of expenses and by the way it helped to shape the individual’s self-image at the end of the Middle Ages. . . . Clothing is more than fabric and ornament; it affects behaviour, determines it or shows it off.’ See also Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, ‘Les échos de la mode dans *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* de Christine de Pisan’, *Razo: Cahiers du Centre d’Etudes Médiévales de Nice* 7 (Faculté de Lettres et de Sciences Humaines, Université de Nice, 1987), 89–94; and Eric Hicks, ‘Discours de la toilette, toilette du discours: de l’idéologie du vêtement dans quelques écrits didactiques de Christine de Pizan’, *Revue des Langues Romanes* 92,2 (1988), 327–42.

should be discreet: 'soiez taisant, ou au moins actrempreement parlant, et sage pour garder et celer les secretz de vostre mary' (ibid., 105). Using *exempla*, the Chevalier criticises women whose dress is outlandish and castigates those women whose speech is unrestrained, recounting the tale of the bourgeoisie who had her nose broken by her husband because '[elle] respondoit à chascune parolle que son seigneur luy disoit tant anvieusement' (*Chevalier*, 40).

Many of the codes of sobriety are also related to the norm of chastity, since from loose speech, flamboyant dress and too forward a manner unchastity can be deduced. The princess, for example, is encouraged in the *Trois Vertus* to conform to a strictly defined mode of behaviour in order to guarantee for herself a sober and chaste reputation: 'elle sera par ceste maniere de vivre tant reamplie et ramenee a tel purté qu'en fait n'en dit, semblant, attour, contenance, maintien, estat, regart, n'aura riens ou il ait a redire ne reprochier' (47, lines 159–62); whilst bourgeois are exhorted to avoid dressing in such a way as to attract illicit male attention: 'avec le mauvais language et blasme qui puet sourdre a femme par abit desordenné et par maniere malhonneste, y a un autre plus perilleux inconvenient: c'est l'amusement des folz hommes qui peuvent penser que elle le face pour estre convoitee et desiree par fole amour' (179, lines 54–9). To make the same point about the need for chaste and sober behaviour in women, the Chevalier recalls an episode from his own personal experience in which he stopped courting a lady who showed herself to be too eager for his love in her manner and bearing: 'Elle avoit assez de langaige et lui sambloit bien, selon ses parolles, qu'elle savoit assez, et si avoit l'ueil bien vif et legier. . . . Et ainsi je ne l'eus pas, et pour la très grant legière manière et la trop grant appertise qui me sembloit à veoir en elle' (*Chevalier*, 28–9).

The treatment of chastity in the *Trois Vertus* adheres to the perspective set out in late medieval *ad status* sermons that women as an estate are defined not primarily by their occupations, as males are, but by their sexuality and their marital status.⁴⁷ Thus the text offers advice on the preservation of the woman's soul and her honour in this world in relation to her degree of social interaction with the male sex, arguing that the state in which women are least likely to fall prey to the dangers of the body is that which involves the least contact with men. Respecting St Paul's hierarchy which

⁴⁷ See Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 109.

ranks virginity (for both sexes) above all other states,⁴⁸ the *Trois Vertus* declares that it is clearly the contemplative life which furnishes the woman with the best possibility of saving both her soul and her reputation. In the chapter addressed to the religious, Reason and the other two Virtues are fulsome in their praise of this life, stating that such women should be esteemed above all others, 'devant toutes [dames] a droit jugier' (165, lines 6–7). Of the seven virtues which the religious are enjoined to follow, the one which is discussed in by far the greatest detail is chastity, described in terms of its capacity not only to liberate the soul from the body, but also to enhance the reputation: 'De ceste, dist saint Bernart, que tout ainsi que la bosme a propriété de garder char de porriture, chasteté garde l'ame sans corrupcion et tient en netteté et conferme la renommee en bonne odeur' (169, lines 119–22).

Below the religious in this hierarchy of virtuous women come virgins who dedicate themselves to spinsterhood and celibacy for life. This section occurs in Book III of the *Trois Vertus*, presumably in recognition of the fact that women of the lower classes were more likely to lead this kind of existence, given the high cost of a dowry paid either to a husband or a convent, whereas most noblewomen would either be married or in orders.⁴⁹ Once again, the text reiterates the value of virginity: 'celles qui ceste vie ont esleue sont de bonne heure nees, car elles ont prise la meilleur partie' (195, lines 33–5). The life of such laywomen should be as devoid as possible of contact with men, and as much devoted to contemplation as can be achieved without withdrawing entirely from the world.

Clearly then, for Christine, it is those women who have *de facto* elected to avoid sexual contact with men, either by choosing to adopt the contemplative life in a convent or to lead a solitary and devout life as virgin spinsters, who are in least danger of unchastity and of suffering the penalty of both blame in this world and damnation in the next. However, since the vast majority of medieval women were in fact either married, betrothed or widowed, with only a minority in orders or choosing to remain secular and single, the *Trois Vertus* devotes most of its practical teaching on chastity to wives. Although the text follows the orthodox theological preference for

⁴⁸ See John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

⁴⁹ On the payment of dowries, see Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 39, and Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London/New York: Longman, 1992), 25–6.

counselling virginity, as against widowhood and marriage, as the most advantageous state for women – and indeed for men – it does not in fact *prescribe* this state. It attempts, instead, largely to address the question of how women might live virtuously and strive to preserve their reputations *within* the institution of marriage. The *Trois Vertus* therefore expounds the glory of chaste women, irrespective of social status: 'que toutes femmes desirent estre de ce renc' (215, lines 6–7). This category is meant to include married women, for chastity means the desire not only to remain a virgin but also to show sexual restraint within marriage, where intercourse between husband and wife is purely for the purposes of procreation and rendering the marriage debt.⁵⁰ In this chapter, the three Virtues once again quote Saints Ambrose and Bernard on chastity, as they did in the passage on the religious, but here they lay greater stress on the significance of chastity as part of one's reputation as opposed to its importance for the good of one's soul: 'Et avec ce que elle est tant tesmoignee estre haulte devant Dieu, l'experience nous demonstre comment semblablement au monde est sa louange exauscee; car ja ne sara estre creature remplie de tant de deffaulz que se il est renom que elle soit chaste, que on ne l'ait en reverence' (216, lines 37–42).

If Christine in the *Trois Vertus* is unusual in being more concerned with women's reputations than with those of their husbands or children, the actual codes of virtuous behaviour – sobriety and chastity – to which she exhorts women to conform are nonetheless completely conventional. Indeed, these codes are ultimately derived from the writings of the Church Fathers, and Tertullian in particular, since the questions of dress, manner, speech and bearing were central to doctrinal teaching on the place of women in Christianity.⁵¹ Yet whilst such codes were often used in patristic writings as part of a misogynist tirade against the vanity of women, in Christine's work they are put to an alternative use, that of praising women in the eyes of the world. Christine would also seem to be indebted to Tertullian for a precept which underpins the whole of her practical instruction to her female readers. In discussing the need for women to be chaste, he states that

⁵⁰ See Gerson's sermon 'De la chasteté conjugale', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7,2, nos. 374–5, 857–68; *Livre des bonnes meurs*, 369–71. See also d'Avray and Tausche, 'Marriage sermons'; Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁵¹ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 50–82.

It is not enough for Christian chastity to be so but it must *seem* so. Your chastity should be so great that it may shine from your soul to your clothes and emanate from the conscience to your outer appearance, so that the special characteristics of chastity, which unite to maintain the faith forever, may be visible for all to see.⁵²

The *Trois Vertus* develops this insistence on virtuous behaviour and appearance which are visible to all, and applies it to the specific social circumstances in which Christine's readers will find themselves, paying particular attention to the problem that a woman's worldly reputation is far more at risk if she is a princess, a noble lady or even a wealthy bourgeoisie than if she is a peasant or an artisan. What distinguishes Christine's advice in the *Trois Vertus* from that of her male counterparts in their courtesy books is her emphasis on what might be termed a 'politics of visibility', a politics designed to protect women but which, paradoxically, would seem to be drawing on a tradition going back to one of the most fervently misogynist Church Fathers. Instead of relying on a straightforward litany of *exempla*, whether *in malo* or *in bono*, as do the *Menagier* and the *Chevalier*, the *Trois Vertus* eschews exemplification in favour of a set of codes of virtuous conduct which must not only be followed, but be *visibly* followed for all to see. The originality of Christine's text therefore resides in its stress on women's skilful mastery and even manipulation of those codes within which their reputations will be defined. If the codes themselves are highly conventional, the use to which Christine encourages her reader to put them – enhancement of her reputation – most certainly is not. In a society where failure to use these codes correctly could lead to both the castigation of the individual woman and the vilification of an entire sex, it was all the more vital that the reader of the *Trois Vertus* should actively *construct* her own honour and reputation as far as it was in her power to do so. Rather than simply demanding women's obedience to their husbands, as her male contemporaries tend to do, Christine's advocacy of the 'politics of visibility' as a method for constructing one's reputation appeals to women's rational self-interest by encouraging them to obtain credit for conforming to a praiseworthy standard of behaviour.

⁵² Tertullian, *The Appearance of Women*, II.13, quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, 57, emphasis added. Although Blamires (*ibid.*, n. 19) points out that Christine asserts that 'one's conscience should not be judged by one's dress' in the *Cité*, in the *Trois Vertus* she does clearly acknowledge that, rightly or wrongly, this is in fact how women *will* be judged.

The *Trois Vertus* offers the married princess seven lessons in prudence which, if she follows them, will consolidate her position at court and enhance her reputation for posterity. Though it is particularly important for the princess to control her behaviour so as to avoid arousing the disapproval of inquisitive and potentially hostile courtiers, much of this advice is also made applicable to all women in their bid to pursue virtue and to obtain a good name for themselves. In proffering these lessons in virtuous living, all of which are informed by her 'politics of visibility', Christine herself is aware that she may be open to the charge of training her readers to be hypocrites whose good reputation is only a façade. As we shall see, she is at pains to defend her text against such a charge by arguing that although her readers should genuinely seek to be virtuous, they may if necessary use a little pretence in order to appear more virtuous than they actually are if they wish to further a good end. Close, if unavoidably lengthy, analysis of all seven lessons will reveal how Christine teaches her readers to navigate their way successfully through the perils posed by a society which subjected their every gesture to detailed scrutiny.

The first and most detailed of these lessons concerns the need for the princess to ensure that she invests her affections in a legitimate object: her lawful husband. She is therefore told to love him and live in peace with him. However, in the interests of her reputation and potential as a female paragon of virtue, it is also important that this investment of affection be clearly *seen* by those around her, a lesson which the *Trois Vertus* delivers to the princess, and by extension to all women: 'Et pour ce . . . que assez de femmes de tous les estaz, nonobstant que elles les aiment chierement, ne scevent pas toutes les rigles, ou par joenesce ou autrement, *de le bien monstrer*, veéz cy nostre leçon qui leur apprendra' (52–3, lines 20–4, emphasis added). Although these signs of wifely love should be genuine, the text does acknowledge that not all husbands are necessarily *deserving* of such a display of loving attention (54, lines 60–5). However, since the 'politics of visibility' ultimately concerns the woman's welfare and not the man's, the *Trois Vertus* insists that it is to her advantage to learn to exhibit the signs of her affection openly: 'Et pour ce que nous parlons aux femmes tant seulement, tendons pour leur prouffit a enseigner les remedes qui peuent estre a eschiver deshonneur, et donner bon conseil de suivre droicte voye, qui que face le contraire, et de faire du bien et du mal leur prouffit' (ibid., lines 71–5). The

Trois Vertus also exhorts married bourgeois to follow this lesson for reasons that are both moral and pragmatic: the good bourgeois wife saves her soul, but also insures her reputation and chances of inheriting her husband's wealth (173). Unlike Christine, who emphasises that a woman should protect her own interests, the *Menagier* simply asserts the need for a wife to look after her husband rather than indicating how this will redound to her own greater glory and reputation. He sums up the essence of this lesson with a proverb frequently employed in misogynist texts: 'Troiz choses sont qui chassent le preudomme hors de sa maison, c'est assavoir: maison descouverte, cheminee fumeuse et femme rioteuse' (*Menagier*, 99–100).⁵³

In the *Trois Vertus*, Prudence Mondaine stresses not only the good that will accrue to a wife who visibly loves her husband but also the dangers which she avoids in so doing. The advice which she offers the princess on how best to remonstrate with a wayward, adulterous husband highlights the need for extreme circumspection on the woman's part: 'la voit on le sens et la prudence de la sage femme, qui que elle soit, quant elle scet tout ce supporter et dissimuler saignement sans faire semblant que elle s'en aperçoive' (55, lines 78–80). Rather than denouncing her husband in public, the princess is encouraged to act so as to avoid suffering any possible dangerous consequences for herself, such as repudiation or dishonour (*ibid.*, lines 84–6). The *Menagier* evokes a similar scenario of a bourgeois who, instead of vilifying her unfaithful husband in public, looked after his mistress and eventually won him back through kindness (*Menagier*, 113–15). However, he differs from Christine in accentuating more the need for a wife to protect *her husband's* reputation than the problems she faces if she accuses him openly of infidelity. Whereas the *Menagier* praises the selflessness of the forgiving wife, Christine clearly states that it is precisely the wife's own good which is at stake and that she will make useful capital out of her virtuous conduct if she continues to show that she loves her husband as much as ever. The wife's discretion should thus be made known to all: 'Ycestes manieres tenir sont de grant honneur a dame; et pour ce, quoy que elle les face de

⁵³ This proverbial saying was extremely popular among medieval writers; see, for example, *Lamentations*, vol. 1, Book II, lines 68–70:

Il est vray que fumée et pluye
Et femme tençant sans raison
Chacent l'omme de sa maison.

bon cuer, si voudra elle toutevoies que elles soyent manifestes et sceues au monde, et non mie celes: la cause si est que elle aime honneur et le bien de renommee, comme dit est' (56, lines 121–5).

In addition to investing emotionally in her husband, the princess is told to place her affections in her husband's family, who are also legitimate objects of her love. The second teaching delivered to the princess by Prudence Mondaine informs her: 'elle aimera et honnourera les parens de son seigneur, et le demonstrera' (ibid., lines 7–8). Here too, the text underlines that it is in the princess's interest to protect herself from danger by visibly cultivating her husband's family, even if she actually dislikes them, as they can pose a potential threat to her position and take action against her (58, lines 37–9). Furthermore, by acting favourably even towards those whom she would in fact prefer to snub, she gives the lie to a frequent misogynist charge laid against women, that they automatically dislike anyone whom their husband favours: 'si diroit on que voirement est il vray que femme n'aimera ja personne que son mary aime' (ibid., lines 128–30).

The third teaching points out that the princess's own children are also safe objects for her love, and that she will be praised for being a caring and attentive mother: 'si les doit bien tenir chierement, et est grant loz de dire que elle en soit soigneuse, car c'est signe que elle est saige et bonne' (59, lines 23–5).⁵⁴ Indeed, given that one of the princess's chief functions is to ensure the succession, her children should be regarded as 'le plus grant port-seureté et parement que elle puist avoir' (ibid., lines 20–1), thus reinforcing the stability of her position at court. Moreover, she leaves herself open to criticism if she fails to be seen to be concerned about her children's welfare (ibid., lines 21–3). In comparison, the Chevalier de La Tour Landry gives no specific instruction to his daughters on how they should behave towards their children, other than recounting a brief cautionary tale against cursing them and sending them to the devil (*Chevalier*, 165–6). However, it is clear from the biblical examples which he adduces (Sarah, 162–3; Rebecca, 163–5; and Rachel, 167–8) that the birth of a child should be regarded as a reward from God for a woman's virtue, rather than, as in the *Trois Vertus*, as a visible sign by which she can forge her own reputation.

⁵⁴ On medieval views about children, see Jenny Swanson, 'Childhood and childrearing in *ad status* sermons by later thirteenth century friars', *Journal of Medieval History* 16,4 (1990), 309–33; Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990).

In a court atmosphere pervaded by a persistent threat of criticism and danger, the princess is encouraged to seek all the help she can get from those figures who can assist her in her pursuit of virtuous conduct, and so Prudence Mondaine's fourth teaching encourages her to befriend her enemies. Here the *Trois Vertus* gives the clearest exposition so far of Christine's 'politics of visibility' in advocating that for her own protection, the princess should effectively attempt to turn all possibly harmful detractors into benefactors by maintaining a friendly appearance even in the face of hostility. She must therefore be mistress of all signs by which her thoughts might be judged, especially facial expressions ('la bonne chiere' 63, line 47), and speech ('que elle soit maistresse de sa bouche' 64, line 62), with which to pretend to show good will.⁵⁵ The *Trois Vertus* calls this strategy to win one's enemies over to one's side 'discrete dissimulation et prudent cautele' (ibid., lines 86–7), a strategy which Christine justifies by a nice piece of casuistry: though based on pretence, such dissimulation is in fact virtuous because it does not aim to harm anyone, only to mislead them a little for their own good, 'quant faicte est a cause de bien et de paix et sans a nul nuire, pour eschiver greigneur inconvenient' (ibid., lines 88–9).

The fifth teaching, directed at obtaining the good graces of the clergy and the princess's subjects of all estates, relies on skilful cultivation of good will rather than on outright pretence. The clergy in particular, whose prayers can serve as an 'escu et deffense contre les murmures et rapors de ses envieux mesdisans' (66, lines 20–1), are indispensable to the princess, who is enjoined to make large, publicly acknowledged donations to religious houses. Since such advice could be construed as encouraging deception, the *Trois Vertus* takes pains to defend its proposed methods, claiming that the princess's intention is not to trick anyone, but simply to ensure that her genuinely good reputation is made known to all. Provided such donations are made not out of a spirit of 'vaine gloire' (67, line 38) but from a justifiable desire to have prayers said after her death and with the aim of inspiring others to match her generosity, the princess cannot be accused of out-and-out hypocrisy. Rather, true to the spirit of the 'politics of visibility', it is at worst '*juste ypocrisie, car elle tent affin de bien et eschivement de mal*' (67–8, lines 53–4, emphasis added). In other words, although the princess's donation is not made

⁵⁵ See Dulac, 'The representation'.

in a spirit of pure selflessness, it harms no one and indeed benefits both the giver whose good name is thereby enhanced and the receiver whose coffers are replenished.

Apart from the clergy, the princess also has a particularly important set of allies in her constant vigil to preserve her good reputation at court: her ladies-in-waiting. The sixth teaching delivers to the princess the vital lesson that it is not only her actions which must be above reproach but also those of her ladies, since 'selon seigneur, maignee duite' (72, lines 18–19). In order to avoid tarnishing the princess's honour by their own loose manner at court, such ladies must, like their mistress herself, be adept in the mastery of behavioural codes so as to avoid giving out the wrong signals to male courtiers in their speech or demeanour: 'se contiennent entre chevaliers et escuiers et tous hommes par beau maintien, dient leurs paroles simplement et coyement, et s'esbatent et solacent, soit en dances ou autres esbatemens, gracieusement et sans lubrece, ne soyent baudes, saillans, ne effraïces en paroles, contenance, maintien, n'en ris, et ne voient la teste levee comme cers ramages' (72–3, lines 25–30). Even more importantly, in a later section of the *Trois Vertus* devoted to the ladies-in-waiting themselves (123–48), Christine explains that they are expected to reciprocate the princess's friendship and trust by not gossiping about her or wilfully misinterpreting her actions:

assez de femmes de court en maint païs est il de tous estaz, que se elles voyent leur dame et leur maïstresse, sans plus, parler bas a une personne une fois ou deux, ou quelque signe de priveté ou d'amistié, ou quelque ris ou quelque joyeuseté faire, par aventure par joenesce ou par ignorance et sans mal penser, se la dicte maïstresse est tant soit petit joyeuse ou en ses abillemens gente et propre . . . tantost ilz seront prests d'en mesjugier. (144, lines 25–33)⁵⁶

The final teaching delivered to the princess concerns the highly practical issue of her finances (74–6). However, even here the text stresses that she must think not only about gratifying her immediate personal needs but also about how to act so as to ensure her reputation. Thus she should not risk losing the good will of her subjects by imposing excessive taxation on them, by allowing her

⁵⁶ See Marie-Thérèse Lorcin, 'Au Moyen Age: l'amitié au féminin: le témoignage de Christine de Pizan', *Cahiers d'Histoire* 36,2 (1991), 89–100; Marion Guarinos, 'Individualisme et solidarité dans *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* de Christine de Pizan', in Ribémont, *Sur le chemin*, 87–100.

officers to behave irresponsibly in their dealings with creditors, or by failing to set aside sufficient funds for the relief of the poor.

Christine's advice to her female readers in the *Trois Vertus*, on how to observe the norms of chastity and sobriety and to live according to her seven principles of prudence, is conceived to help them cope with the practical problem of how to behave towards members of their own families and of their wider social circles. However, she also aims in this text to meet a different set of needs, ones which to her mind were no less important: how to teach women to live in such a way as to bring credit to themselves and to their sex as a whole. Christine's 'politics of visibility' shows her contemporaries the way not just to virtue in their own lives but also to a shining reputation for posterity.

WOMEN IN LOVE: REWRITING MISOGYNIST STEREOTYPES

Christine's defence of women in the *Trois Vertus* goes beyond simply refuting clerical misogyny or providing practical instruction in the art of creating a good name for oneself. In this text, she returns once more to the problem of how to refute the literary stereotype, promoted in courtly texts, of woman as wilful adulteress, a problem with which she had grappled from the very beginning of her writings. As we have seen, throughout her critique of misogyny Christine's views on women were formed in a constant engagement with Jean de Meung's *Rose*. The *Trois Vertus* is no exception to that rule. Since, to Christine's mind, chastity is one of the key virtues which attest to a woman's good reputation, she is particularly concerned in this work to teach women to protect themselves from accusations of unchastity, both from their contemporaries and from posterity. The *Trois Vertus* therefore counsels against adulterous love or 'fol'amor', arguing that it not only leads to the loss of a woman's soul and honour, but also provides misogynist writers with ready-made *exempla* with which to denigrate the female sex as a whole.⁵⁷ In order to reinforce this teaching, the *Trois Vertus* evokes stereotypical literary scenarios from courtly texts such as the *Rose* which represent women as unchaste, but then re-works them with the aim of exhorting the reader to avoid being commemorated as an adulteress.

⁵⁷ On misogyny in courtly texts see William Calin, 'Contre la *fin'amor*? Contre la femme? Une relecture de textes du Moyen Âge', in Keith Busby and Erik Kooper, eds., *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context (Selected Papers from the Fifth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, Delfen, The Netherlands, 9–16 Aug., 1986)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990).

Christine's discussion of the newly married princess's existence at court and of the amorous temptations which beset her demonstrates with particular clarity how the *Trois Vertus* implicitly rewrites the *Rose*, as here she narrates the events in the course of adulterous love from the woman's, rather than the man's, point of view. In so doing, Christine is obliged to change both the narrative goal of the courtly text, which is adultery, and the distribution of roles given to the different characters in this pursuit of illicit sexual intercourse. In Jean de Meung's version, the scenario runs as follows: the narrative goal is the male's seduction of the female; the subject of the action is the lover, Amant; the object of his quest is the Rose; the obstacles to his goal are all those allegorical attributes of the Rose hostile to his desires; and the allies who help him achieve his goal are the amorous host of the God of Love. In the *Trois Vertus*, by contrast, the goal of the narrative is the preservation of female chastity, honour and virtue; the subject is the princess; the object of her love is her husband; the obstacles to her goal are the would-be seducer/detractor himself and other 'losengier' figures; and her allies are all those female courtiers who can help protect her from harm. Moreover, Christine's advice against adultery which she gives to the princess in the *Trois Vertus* centres on rewriting one of the key figures in the courtly narrative of 'fol'amor': the corrupt duenna or governess character who is meant to chaperone the lady but who traditionally acts as go-between for her and her lover,⁵⁸ of which the most famous example is of course La Vieille.⁵⁹ However, unlike Jean's duenna who is all too eager to abet the lover in his seduction of the Rose, the governess in the *Trois Vertus* is enlisted as the chief ally in the princess's fight to preserve her chastity. Christine's text thus removes the governess from a narrative of seduction and places

⁵⁸ An example of a courtly duenna is Tessala, Fénice's nurse in Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, ed. Alexandre Micha, *Classiques Français du Moyen Age* (Paris: Champion, 1982). Although Tessala is not presented in misogynist fashion as La Vieille is in the *Rose*, she is nonetheless unambiguously portrayed as a woman with a sexual past which allows her to sympathise with and help to resolve the courtly lovers' problems (*Cligés*, lines 3055–8).

⁵⁹ See Luis Beltrán, 'La Vieille's past', *Romanische Forschungen* 84 (1972), 77–92; William Matthews, 'The Wife of Bath and all her sect', *Viator* 5 (1974), 413–43; Lee Patterson, '"For the Wyves love of Bathe": feminine rhetoric and poetic resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*', *Speculum* 58 (1983), 656–94; Sarah Kay, 'Women's body of knowledge: epistemology and misogyny in the *Romance of the Rose*', in Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester University Press, 1994), 211–35; Heather Arden, 'Women as readers, women as text in the *Roman de la Rose*', in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, eds., *Women, the Book and the Worldly, Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 111–17.

her into a narrative of self-preservation, arguing that when the princess accepts the governess as her helper, no harm can come to her. When, however, the princess places herself in the position of the Rose as the object of an illicit love, she mistakenly regards her governess as her enemy and risks bringing about her own downfall.

The *Trois Vertus* explains that, to be a trustworthy ally, the governess should be chosen by the princess's parents for a number of qualities, none of which, apart from her age, has anything in common with those of La Vieille.⁶⁰ She is described as 'assez d'aage, prudent, bonne et devoute' (92, line 41) as opposed to being like the 'orde vielle puant, moussue' of Jean's text (*Rose*, line 4080). One of her chief tasks is to school the princess in the mastery of the codes of behaviour which will be necessary for constructing her reputation at court: 'tout le bel maintien en parler, contenance et attours et vestemens qui apertienent a princepe de hault parage, lui enortera a faire et s'y maintenir en tel maniere qu'il n'y ait que redire' (94, lines 113–16). As we have seen, the *Trois Vertus* is careful to show that this type of conduct is 'discrete dissimulacion' (64, line 86) which falls short of actual deception. It is therefore important that the governess's role in inculcating such conduct in the princess should be distinguished from that of La Vieille, who specifically aims to teach her pupil how to use codes to deceive:

Si doit fame, s'el n'est musarde,
fere samblant d'estre couarde,
de trembler, d'estre pooreuse,
d'estre destrainte et angoisseuse
quant son ami doit recevoir. (*Rose*, lines 13765–9)

As guardian of both the princess's welfare and her chastity, it is the governess's task to ensure that the princess continues to place her affection in her husband, the only legitimate object of her love. Between these two lawfully wedded people, the governess *can* safely act out her traditional role as go-between: '[elle] prendra grant cure d'elle meismes porter entr'eulx gracieux messages et dons de choses plaisans, recommandacions et salus, pour les nourrir tousjours en celle paix et amour' (97, lines 16–19). However, should she notice any other man intent on seeking out her mistress's company, she must play the part of 'entremetteuse', as did La Vieille, but with the express intention of subverting, not abetting, the seducer's game.

⁶⁰ See Krueger, 'A woman's response', 237.

Whereas La Vieille aids Amant in his course of action, the governess in the *Trois Vertus*, in her capacity as ally to the princess, is expected to take on the hostile attributes needed to protect the lady from male seduction, which in the *Rose* are all personified by separate allegorical figures such as 'Jalousie', 'Dangier' and 'Male Bouche'. The governess must at first *appear* to the would-be lover to be a willing accomplice, for she is told to ingratiate herself with him, as inconspicuously as she can, because it is on her ability to short-circuit the process of 'fol'amor' that her mistress's reputation depends. Using a term which recalls the first stage of the process of seduction in the *Rose*, the governess must make the lover 'bel accueil', and appear to enter into his confidence (99, line 73). Far from encouraging him, however, it is her responsibility to assure him of her intention to defend her mistress from his love at all costs: 'Car de ce, a l'aide de Dieu, la cuideray je bien deffendre, nonobstant qu'elle en est legiere a garder' (100, lines 100–2). Like Dangier in the *Rose*, the governess must be prepared to block the lover's access to the princess at all times, putting up such obstacles ('telz barres', *ibid.*, line 113) that even if the latter wanted to respond to the man's advances, it would be impossible for her to do so. But whereas Dangier is represented as repugnant and terrifying when he is seen through the eyes of the frustrated lover in the *Rose*,⁶¹ the governess in the *Trois Vertus* is advised always to maintain a courteous bearing towards the lover, for fear of betraying her mistress: 'qu'elle n'ait point la chiere muee en enflammee, ne les yeulx felons quant partira de lui, mais le visage rassis et la maniere asseuree, si comme se d'aultres choses eust parlé, afin que personne ne se peust de ce apercevoir' (101, lines 125–8). Moreover, unlike La Vieille, the governess should be impervious to any kind of bribe from the lover: 'ne pour promesse, don, offre ne menace ne changera son propos' (*ibid.*, lines 122–3).⁶²

Should the princess show any sign of encouraging a suitor in his

⁶¹ In Guillaume de Lorris's section of the *Rose*, Dangier is represented in the following terms:

Granz fu et noirs et hericiez,
s'ot les ieux roges come feus,
le nés froncié, le vis hideus,
et s'escrie come forcenez. (*Rose*, lines 2906–9)

Jean de Meung takes up Guillaume's description of Dangier and has Amant refer to him as a 'vilains fel et aoursez' (*Rose*, line 15360).

⁶² La Vieille is only too ready to sell Bel Accueil for a pair of gloves: see *Rose*, lines 14664–73.

amorous intentions, the governess is expected to intervene to dissuade her from any such ideas by telling her stories of feckless seducers and of the harm which they cause women (102, lines 167–70). Significantly though, the governess differs from La Vieille in that these cautionary tales do not arise from her own personal experience, nor are they motivated by any selfish desire for revenge on the male sex for her long-lost youth and betrayal by the one man she loved.⁶³ Instead, her function in repeating such tales to the princess is more akin to that of Male Bouche in the *Rose*, whose responsibility it was to bring Amant's dishonorable intentions to public notice.⁶⁴ Finally, if the governess's warnings against foolish love are not heeded, she should leave the adulterous princess's service but explain to her that she acted only out of 'jalousie' (108, line 110), a desire to defend her mistress, thus evoking the name of the allegorical figure in whose castle Bel Accueil was made prisoner in the *Rose*.

Far from acting like Jean's corrupt Vieille, the governess's defence of the princess's chastity in the *Trois Vertus* necessitates a fair welcome but one designed to dissuade in a courteous manner, a strenuous resistance to seduction, a readiness to decry lascivious male intentions, and a fierce loyalty to guard her mistress from attack. However, Christine's governess also distinguishes herself from La Vieille in another important respect: she takes up a pen to write a final letter of warning to her mistress, in the aim of discouraging her from following the perilous path of foolish love. This final step has to be taken only when the frivolous princess has rejected her governess's advice and chosen instead to see her as the enemy.

The governess's letter, taken from one of Christine's previous verse works, the *Livre du Duc des vrais amans* (1403–5),⁶⁵ constitutes a written, rather than a verbal, admonishment to the princess and is designed to act upon her conscience with greater authority: 'pour ce

⁶³ For La Vieille's lament, see *Rose*, lines 12838–49.

⁶⁴ Note that Male Bouche's tales are dismissed as 'fauses' by Amant who, ironically, believes his seduction of the Rose to be honourable:

car Male Bouche est costumiers
de raconter fauses noveles
de vallez et de damoiselles.

(*Rose*, lines 3556–8)

⁶⁵ For a translation of this text into modern English, see Thelma S. Fenster and Nadia Margolis, trans., *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers* (New York: Persea Books, 1991).

que ce qui est escript en lettres est aucunes foiz mieulx retenue et plus perce le cuer que ce qui est dit de bouche' (110, lines 13–15). Yet the letter is not only intended to be more effective than an oral warning, it also recalls how the written text itself can be used as a means by which a person's reputation can be recorded, for better or for worse. It is therefore supposed to remind the princess of the risks involved in sacrificing her reputation for transient pleasures. The original text to which the letter alludes, the *Duc des vrais amans*, deals with exactly this problem, in its analysis of the role of the lady in the courtly love scenario.⁶⁶ Although ostensibly the account of a loyal young duke's passion and told from his perspective, the text ends with the distraught 'complainte' of the dishonoured princess whose secret liaison with the duke has been discovered. As an *exemplum in malo* of adulterous love, this work functions as a salutary lesson when alluded to in the *Trois Vertus* precisely because the princess in the *Duc des vrais amans* failed to heed the letter of dissuasion sent her by her old friend and confidante, Seville de Mont Hault, Dame de la Tour. This 'sibyl', often seen by critics as a figure for Christine herself,⁶⁷ is also, by her very name, an anti-Vieille: whereas the corrupt duenna in the *Rose* betrays her mistress to the amorous host and causes the tower of her chastity to be penetrated, the Dame de la Tour is intended to be a foresighted and devoted guardian of the tower of her princess's virtue.

If the figure of the governess constitutes an anti-Vieille, the actual substance of Seville's letter is an anti-*Rose*. It recalls the various stages of love and how perilous each stage is for the princess. Firstly, the letter rehearses the visible codes of behaviour by which the princess should be governed (111), and points out that 'fol'amor' represents a danger to her precisely because the physical signs of love undermine those codes on which her chastity and reputation depend:

Et comme ces dictes condicions et toutes manieres convenables a haulte princepsse fussent en vous le temps passé, estes a present toute changee, si

⁶⁶ See Liliane Dulac, 'Christine de Pisan et le malheur des "vrais amans"', in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Pierre Le Gentil* (Paris: SEDES, 1973), 223–33; Krueger, 'A woman's response'; Sandra Hindman and Stephen Perkinson, 'Insurgent voices: illuminated versions of Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre du Duc des vrais amans*', in Zimmermann and De Rentiis, *City*, 221–31.

⁶⁷ See Krueger, 'A woman's response', 237.

come on dit, car vous estes devenue trop plus esgaïee, plus enparlee, et plus jolie que ne soliez estre, et c'est ce qui fait communement jugier les cuers changiéz quant les contenance se changent. (112, lines 68–73)

Secondly, the letter recalls the dangers of the *gradus amoris*, since, as in the *Rose* itself, once the third and fourth stages of conversation and kissing have been reached, the fifth stage of sexual intercourse is inevitable.⁶⁸ As Bel Accueil explains to Amant: 'car qui au bessier puet atendre / a poine puet a tant remaindre' (*Rose*, lines 3385–6). The princess in the *Trois Vertus* should therefore not delude herself into thinking that she has avoided scandal by not (yet) actually committing the adulterous act itself: 'Et quant a dire ce ne sera mie mal puisque le fait de pechié n'y sera, hélas! Madame, ne soit nul ne nulle si asseure de soy qu'elle se rende certaine de soy, quelque bon propos qu'elle ait de garder tousjours mesure en si faicte amour' (115, lines 153–7). The *Duc des vrais amans* itself should be textual reminder enough of the impossibility of refraining from physical love, since the lady in that work fails to maintain her original intention not to have a sexual relationship with the duke.⁶⁹ Furthermore, even if the princess in the *Trois Vertus* is convinced that she can maintain a platonic friendship with her admirer, the danger remains that others will naturally assume that she has reached the fifth stage of the *gradus amoris*, since the slightest sign of love will be exaggerated in the re-telling: 'Car posons qu'il n'y ait meffait de corps, si ne le croient mie ceulx qui seulement orront dire: telle dame est amoureuse, – et pour un bien petit de semblant, . . . les mauvaises langues jugeront et y adjousteront des choses qui oncques ne furent faictes ne pensees' (113, lines 107–12). Finally, Sebille's letter rejects the conventional courtly argument that such love can be ennobling. In the example of the *Duc des vrais amans*, the young duke may gain prowess and valour from his sentimental education, but the princess has obtained nothing but opprobrium.⁷⁰ Overturning the courtly convention of the lady as 'domna' or lord and the lover as servant and vassal, the *Trois Vertus* asserts that the adulterous relationship works only to the advantage of the male not the female: 'ilz servent eulx mesmes, car l'onneur et le preu leur en demeure et non mie a la dame' (116, lines 170–1). Taking this argument one step further, Christine's text asserts that even when the relationship is over, the

⁶⁸ See Lionel J. Friedman, 'Gradus Amoris', *Romance Philology* 19,2 (1965), 167–77.

⁶⁹ *Duc des vrais amans*, lines 2859–65.

⁷⁰ See Dulac, 'Le malheur', 230.

seducer then becomes a detractor and has the power to destroy the woman's reputation through malicious slander (118, lines 232–5).

The role of the governess in the *Trois Vertus* is to help the young married princess to avoid falling into the stereotype of the dishonoured adulterous lady of courtly romance. In this respect, Christine's text echoes a concern voiced by female characters from within the romance genre itself. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*, for example, Fénice is adamant that her love for Cligés should not lead to their being commemorated as a new Tristan and Iseut, the archetypal disgraced and doomed couple:

Mialz voldroie estre desmanbree
Que de nos deus fust remanbree
L'amors d'Ysolt et de Tristan,
Don mainte folie dit an,
Et honte en est a reconter. (Cligés, lines 3105–9)⁷¹

In the context of courtesy literature, the Dame de La Tour Landry, in debate with her husband over the merits and demerits of passionate love, similarly evokes several literary examples of tragic adulteresses who loved 'par amours': 'La dame de Coucy et son amy en morurent, et sy firent le chevallier et la chatellainne de Vergy, et puis la duchesse' (*Chevalier*, 260). Significantly too, there are no happy courtly lovers in Christine's own *Cité*, only several examples of women betrayed by feckless men such as Jason and Aeneas. In re-writing the narrative of 'fol'amor' contained in texts such as the *Rose*, the *Trois Vertus* thus teaches that it is as a dutiful and loving wife, not as a passionate, hedonistic adulteress, that the princess, and indeed all other married women, should seek to be remembered.

CONCLUSION

For many critics, the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus* are antithetical in their aims, the former challenging the misogynist opinion that women have made no great contribution to human history, the latter conforming to the dominant ideological view that the female sex must be meek and chaste. In fact, it is more useful to see both works

⁷¹ See D.W. Robertson, 'The idea of fame in Chrétien's *Cligés*', in his *Essays in Medieval Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1980), 183–201; Peggy McCracken, 'The body politic and the Queen's adulterous body in French Romance', in Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, eds., *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 38–64.

as addressing a common problem, that of how women can achieve a respected place in society within the constraints imposed upon them by the contemporary order. Taking as its *raison d'être* the need to help women forge virtuous reputations for themselves and thereby confound anti-feminist doctrine, the *Trois Vertus* translates the ideals which underpin Christine's catalogue of virtuous women in the *Cité* into the generic conventions of the courtesy book. Yet the *Trois Vertus* diverges from other courtesy books by male writers in several significant ways: it teaches its readers first, how to use their rationality to overcome the temptations of the body; secondly, how to gain maximum credit for their virtuous conduct in the eyes of the world; and thirdly, how to avoid falling into the misogynist stereotype of woman as lascivious adulteress. Addressing the female sex in its entirety, whilst devoting most attention to those high-born members whom Christine deemed to be in greatest need of pragmatic advice, the *Trois Vertus* emphasises women's capacity to exercise their reason in making choices about their souls and reputations. Having targeted the princely reader in her earlier works such as the *Othéa* and the *Avision*, Christine turned to a female readership in the *Trois Vertus*, but the ethical lesson which she sought to deliver is the same in both cases: that private morality should form the foundation of one's public role. Christine's interest did not lie in challenging the existing power structures which, in the later Middle Ages, severely restricted the part that a woman could actually play in the public arena. Rather, her aim, whether addressing men or women, was always to encourage them to perform their ethical duty. She therefore exhorts the male readers of the *Othéa* and the *Avision* to lead their fellow countrymen to virtue by their own good example, and urges the female readers of the *Trois Vertus* to inspire other women to glory by their commendable behaviour. Whereas she instructs her male readership to take responsibility for their own desires rather than adopting the misogynist tactic of blaming women for men's moral failings, she incites her female audience to act in such a way as to silence misogynists forever. The *Trois Vertus*, Christine's last prose text in defence of women, may offer no revolutionary solutions to the position of the female sex in society, but it does teach its readers to determine for themselves the significance of their existence as creatures defined not just by the 'accidents' of their gender and estate but also by the 'essence' of their reason and soul.

Conclusion

Christine de Pizan's defence of women has often been judged simply in terms of one book, the justly celebrated *Cité*. Yet her desire to take up her pen in order to refute the dominant medieval tradition of clerically misogyny informed a multiplicity of texts across a variety of genres. Whilst previous assessments of Christine's feminism have tended to stress the disparities between her works, this study has attempted instead to show that there is in fact a thematic unity which underlies them. The ideas about women's place in literature and history which Christine formulated explicitly in her contribution to the 'querelle de la *Rose*' inform not just the *Cité* but all of the prose works examined here. Central to Christine's polemic against misogyny is her view that it is a pernicious doctrine which produces harmful effects on male and female readers alike. Misogynist writings encourage male readers to adopt a view of the female sex as a source either of erotic pleasure or of potential damnation. When coupled with misogynous teachings, such writings undermine marriage as an institution within which sexual relations are permissible and through which the two sexes may avoid mortal sin. In female readers, anti-feminist works evoke feelings of self-hate and self-disgust, leading them to the heterodox conclusion that their sex is less than human and even constitutes an aberration in God's creation.

As well as refuting the content and teachings of misogynist texts, Christine condemns their rhetorical strategies. First, she argues that authors such as Ovid and Jean de Meung lack responsibility towards their readers in their over-use of generalisation, which leads them to attack one sex in its entirety rather than criticising the failings of particular individuals within both sexes. Secondly, Christine inveighs against the anti-feminist literary practice of presenting examples of lascivious male and female behaviour without explicitly spelling out

for the reader that such behaviour should be abhorred. Finally, she castigates writers such as Jean for employing the veiled language of allegory for the purpose of titillation rather than for its proper use: the exposition of moral and spiritual truths.

Christine's self-imposed task is to provide both her male and female readers with an 'antidote' to what she sees as the poisonous doctrine of misogyny. When writing for men, she counters anti-feminist slander by adopting the tactic of encouraging them to read texts and *exempla* involving women for the way in which they are revealed to be models of moral and spiritual conduct suitable for all. In the *Othéa* and the *Avision*, Christine employs both the genre of the courtesy book and that of the 'mirror for princes' in order to persuade the male reader to look beyond the identification of woman with the body and man with the soul, and to attach greater significance to what unites the two sexes – their higher human faculties such as rationality – than to what distinguishes them. Treating the prince's conduct in love as one of the key facets of his knightly behaviour, Christine in the *Othéa* teaches her reader to avoid drawing misogynist lessons from the amorous tales which she borrows from classical mythology. Instead, she attempts to wean him off what she regards as the dubious pleasures of the literal level of the 'texte' and to direct him towards the more lasting delights of the moral and spiritual teachings contained in her 'glose' and 'allegorie'. Throughout this work, Christine invites the reader to interpret the women who appear in her stories of sensual love not as signifiers of the erotic body, but rather as bearers of lessons for the human soul. Thus, Christine's use of patristic exegesis, far from colluding with the patriarchal order as some scholars have suggested, employs spiritual allegory precisely in order to break with the anti-feminist assumption that a woman's bad deeds necessarily indict her entire sex.

Turning to more explicitly political matters in the *Avision*, Christine proposes herself as a guide for her male reader as she embarks on a search for a remedy to the ills which have beset the state of France. In this 'mirror for princes', Christine subordinates her autobiographical narrative, which has so fascinated modern critics, to a general programme of ethical instruction for the princely reader. The Boethian consolation which she receives from Dame Philosophie, in which she learns of the need to strip away the contingencies of her temporal existence such as gender and status the better to focus on the needs of her eternal soul, is not a message

meant for her alone. The prince himself is expected to follow Christine's example and to draw his mind away from material concerns and towards contemplation of his spiritual well-being. However, this spiritual teaching is by no means a recommendation of detachment from the world. Rather, in common with other 'mirrors for princes', the *Avision* unites the realms of morality and politics in order to remind the princely reader of the practical significance of moral self-rule, in both this world and the next.

When writing for the female reader, in the *Cité* and the *Trois Vertus*, Christine acknowledges the power relations at work in late medieval society whereby women are constantly exposed to the dangers of misogynist slander. In response to this threat, she both challenges anti-feminist misconceptions about the female sex and teaches women themselves how to refute such slander by adopting virtuous forms of behaviour. As in the *Avision*, Christine presents herself in the *Cité* as a model for her reader, but in this case it is the female reader who must learn to valorise women as fully human. The aim of this biographical catalogue of illustrious heroines is to comfort Christine, and by extension, her contemporaries, by celebrating women's great achievements throughout the course of human history. The *Cité* thus rejects the equation of virtue and virility propounded in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus* and asserts instead that civic, moral and spiritual virtues have no gender and can be found in both sexes. Despite the wide range of human activities in which heroines of the past have excelled, Christine accepts the restrictions imposed on women by her own society. However, she emphasises that in spite of such constraints, her female readers can still aspire to and achieve moral virtue in their own particular sphere of influence. Whilst respecting the hierarchy of virtues which ranks women's spiritual benefits to humanity above all others, Christine argues that her readers do have the potential to act with intelligence, courage and integrity in their family and domestic lives.

In order to help the female reader attain the level of virtue necessary to become a worthy inhabitant of the 'City of Ladies', the *Trois Vertus* offers practical advice on how women can achieve three related goals: a blameless life, a good name for posterity and a refutation of misogynist stereotypes. As before, Christine is acutely aware of the danger of anti-feminist slander and so devotes this courtesy book to teaching her reader to perfect her behaviour through mastery of the visible codes of chastity and sobriety by

which society defines and judges female conduct. Disappointingly, perhaps, for the modern critic, Christine offers no radical alternative to such traditional moral values. Rather she seeks to empower her female reader by showing her how to display her virtue through sober speech, modest dress and a chaste bearing, and thereby disprove the misogynist equation of femininity and sinfulness.

As the first woman in Western literature to undertake a sustained defence of her sex, Christine de Pizan occupies a central place in the pantheon of feminism. However, she is clearly no forerunner of the modern feminist cause in the detail either of her literary practice or of her sexual politics. Unlike those theorists who seek to 'write in the feminine' by challenging 'phallogentric' language and exploring the free play of the signifier once it is liberated from the straitjacket of referentiality,¹ Christine adhered to the same ideals as her male contemporaries, such as Gerson, in using language as a vehicle for conveying moral, spiritual and political truths with as little ambiguity as possible. For Christine, whether she was addressing the French princes in order to bring them back from the brink of civil war, or misogynists with the aim of convincing them of women's potential for rational and moral actions, her texts were intended to inculcate virtue in their readers since, to her mind, the act of writing was, above all, an ethical act. Unlike those feminist scholars who seek to question the very foundations of patriarchal logic and thought,² Christine was herself thoroughly indebted to the philosophical tradition bequeathed to the Middle Ages by the male thinkers of classical Antiquity as well as to the Church Fathers and the theologians of her own time. Instead of wishing to repudiate 'masculine' modes of thought, Christine took from her philosophical and doctrinal sources precisely what was necessary to construct her own pro-woman arguments. Finally, unlike those modern feminists who exhort women to valorise sexual difference and to celebrate the female body and its libidinous impulses,³ Christine was in flight from

¹ See, for example, Hélène Cixous, 'Le rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc* 61 (1975), 39–54. See also Morag Schiach, *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991); Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

² See Luce Irigaray, *Spéculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974). See also Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991).

³ See, for instance, Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974); Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune Née* (Paris: UGE, 1975); Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977). See also Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

the body in favour of the spirit. Ironically, in the medieval period, it was the misogynist tradition in all its manifestations – scientific, theological and literary – which aligned the female sex with corporeality and sensuality in order to justify their claims about women's social, juridical and psychological inferiority to men. Given this context, Christine was obliged to minimise the fact of sexual difference and to insist instead on the shared humanity of men and women in intellectual, moral and even physiological terms.

Christine's achievement as a champion of women therefore lies not in her anticipation of the strategies which later feminists would employ, but rather in her prolonged critical engagement with the dominant ideology of her own day. In shifting the medieval debate about women on to areas where the two sexes *could* be deemed equal as rational moral agents, Christine managed to turn this ideology against itself and to beat misogynists with the very same stick as they themselves had used to chastise the female sex. She was able to assert that in condemning women as the snares of the devil which lead men into sin, it was the anti-feminists who were guilty of theological error and heterodoxy. In refusing to show charity towards their fellow female human beings and in denying the countless benefits that women had brought to humankind, Christine claimed that misogynists themselves were running the risk of damnation. Though many of Christine's arguments in favour of women, such as her stress on the moral equality of male and female, have long since been superseded by other pragmatic and ideological issues, they nonetheless commanded a great deal of authority in their own time. We need to pay Christine's critique of misogyny the respect it deserves and to see it as a dialogue with the society and culture of the late Middle Ages, rather than simply praising it – or denouncing it – for the extent to which it does or does not look forward to the feminist ideals and beliefs of the twentieth century. Christine's voice in defence of women is utterly different from our own, but it was in its time a dissenting voice, one which spoke out to its audience with as much urgency and vigour as that of any modern feminist today.

Index

- Abelard, Pierre, 24
Historia Calamitatum, 92, 113
accessus ad auctores commentaries, 29–32,
33–4, 35, 43, 46, 47
Acciaiuoli, Andrea, 138–9
Actaeon, 65, 70–2
Adam, 150, 155, 156, 160
Adonis, 65, 70–2
Aeneas, 213
Aglaros, 83
Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, 38
Albertano of Brescia, *Book of Consolation and Advice*, 141
Albertus Magnus, *Du Secret des femmes*, 150
Alexander the Great, 169
allegory,
as didactic tool, 61–4
in the *Rose*, 37–8, 46, 78, 207–10
political use of, 96–100
Amant, 11, 13, 19, 31, 65, 69, 72–4, 81, 207,
209, 210, 212 *see also* Fol Amoureux
Ambrose, St, 26, 199
Ami, 160
Amnon, 104
anamnesis, 153, 161
Andalò del Negro, 156
Antiochus, 191
antiphrasis, 92 n.16, 145, 149
Antonia, wife of Belisarius, 169
Antonia, wife of Drusus Tiberius, 171
Aquinas, St Thomas, 162
Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,
120
Arachne, 161
Aristotle, 30, 35, 74, 108–9, 119–21, 143,
151, 163, 189
Economics, 151
Ethics, 98 n. 40
Metaphysics, 90, 109, 120
Politics, 98 n. 40
Augustine, St, 16, 61, 63, 72, 84, 86, 94–5,
119, 143 150, 158, 185
City of God, 134
Confessions, 92
De Doctrina Christiana, 63 n. 29, 95 n. 24
autobiography, 90–3, 113–26
Baird, Joseph L., 9
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 57
Bel Accueil, 209, 212
Belshazzar, 105
Bernard of Clairvaux, St, 124, 191, 199
Bersuire, Pierre, 47
Blanchard, Joël, 91
Boccaccio, 32, 47 n. 79, 84
De Casibus, 131–2, 133, 136–7, 139, 140,
156–7
De Mulieribus, 67 n. 37, 131–2, 133–4,
137–40, 157–8, 159, 195
Genealogia Deorum Gentilium, 58, 94
Il Filostrato, 84 n. 69
body politic, 65, 77, 87–8, 93, 98, 110–13
Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, 90–1, 116,
121–4, 145, 153, 160
Bonaventure, St, 33–4, 40
Brownlee, Kevin, 91
Bynum, Caroline Walker, 187
Cadmus, 63
Carruthers, Mary, 153
Cassiodorus, 83
Catherine of Alexandria, St, 163
Catiline, 40
Ceres, 157, 161, 165
Chance, Jane, 79
Chaos, 95, 98–9, 101–2, 104
Charlemagne, 101, 102
Charles V of France, 1, 101, 102–3, 105,
114, 116, 117
Charles VI of France, 90, 96, 101, 103, 194
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 61
Canterbury Tales, 48
Legend of Good Women, 84
Troilus and Criseyde, 84 n. 69

- Chevalier de La Tour Landry, *Chevalier*,
181–2, 183, 185, 187–9, 194–7, 200,
203, 213
- Childeric, 104
- Chrétien de Troyes, 1
Cligés, 213
- Christine de Pizan
as model for the reader, 59, 118–26,
152–4
life of, 1
Avision, 5, 51, 89–127, 128, 166, 180, 189,
214, 216–17
Cité, 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 17, 23, 50–1, 78, 87,
121, 128–74, 175–81, 213–14, 215,
217
Dieu d'Amours, 5, 7, 82–3, 151, 178
Dit de la Rose, 5
Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc, 4
Duc des vrais amans, 4 n. 13, 210–12
Epistre à la Reine, 91
Fais et bonnes meurs, 53, 92, 103
Mutacion, 122, 158
Othéa, 3, 4, 5, 7, 15, 28, 47, 49, 51, 52–88,
94–5, 98, 126–7, 128, 166, 167, 180,
214, 216
Paix, 53, 75, 92, 115, 158
Policie, 53, 75, 76, 92, 99, 103, 111, 112,
123, 124, 125, 158
'querelle', 5, 6, 7–51, 52, 56, 58, 68, 78,
81, 94, 95, 144, 145, 149, 152, 184, 215
Trois Vertus, 3, 5, 6, 17, 51, 152, 165, 168,
175–214, 217
- Christine, St, 169–70
- Church Fathers, 25, 26, 36, 53, 144, 199 *see*
also Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome,
Tertullian
- Cixous, Hélène, 120
- Cleopatra, 86
- Cligés, 213
- Clotilda, 169
- Clovis, 101, 102, 169
- Col, Gontier, 8, 11, 17, 18, 20–4, 33
- Col, Pierre, 8, 10, 11, 18–28, 31, 33–4, 36,
39–42, 48–9, 144
- Colonna, Egidio *see* Giles of Rome
- Colonna, Giovanni, 133
- Contenance des Fames*, La, 120
- Corinis, 86–7
- Cornificia, 164
- Criseyde (Bryседа), 54, 84, 86
- Cumaean Sibyl, 60
- Cupid, God of Love, 38, 45, 77, 82, 161, 207
- Cyrus, 110
- Dangier, 209
- Dante, 29, 32, 35
Convivio, 35
Divina Commedia, 36, 145–6
- David, 32, 33
- Deduit, 69
- Delany, Sheila, 9–10, 43, 129, 177
- Democritus, 111
- Deschamps, Eustache, *Miroir de Mariage*, 183,
185
- Diana, 70–2, 85
- Dido, 172
- Droiture, 140, 145, 154, 168–9, 171
- Dulac, Liliane, 55
- Echo, 81–2
- Ehrhart, Margaret J., 57
- Eloquence Theologienne, 8, 34, 36, 38
- Ephigenia, 163
- euhemerism, 53, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86
- Eve, 149, 150–1, 156
- Fénice, 213
- Fleming, John V., 9, 81
- Fol Amoureux, 19, 33, 38, 41, 48
- Fortune, 103, 109–10, 114–15, 117, 125,
136, 137, 139, 155, 156
- Froissart, Jean, 1
- Galen, 86
- Gauvard, Claude, 193
- gender,
'accidental' nature of, 119–22, 189
as linguistic marker, 21–2, 24, 79–87
- Genius, 12–14, 16, 37–8, 45, 49, 160
- genre,
biographical catalogues, 128–32, 139–41,
162
courtesy books, 53, 175–6, 181–2, 185,
187, 194, 200, 213
dream-visions, 89, 95, 102, 140
'mirrors for princes', 53, 74–5, 89, 92,
96–100
see also sermons, autobiography
- Gerson, Jean,
contribution to the 'querelle', 8, 10, 28,
33–9
sermons to his sisters, 184
'Vivat Rex', 96, 98–9, 104, 109, 125
- Ghismonda, 172
- Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 74–6,
98
- Golden Age, myth of, 157, 159–60, 162
- Gould, Graham, 143
- Gower, John, *Confessio Amantis*, 13 n. 16, 75
n. 55, 97, 110

- gradus amoris*, 66, 212
gratitudo, 148–9
 Griselda, 194
 Guillaume de Lorris, 38, 40
 Guillaume de Machaut, 1
 Guillaume de Tignonville, 17, 23

 Hector, 52, 59–63, 67–8, 73–4, 81
 Helen, 76–7
 Heloise, 24
 Hermaphroditus, 64
 Hero, 66, 172
 Hicks, Eric, 45
 Hill, Jillian M., 29
 Hindman, Sandra L., 59–60, 75
 Hoccleve, Thomas, *Regement of Princes*, 93
 n. 19
 Honoré de Bouvet, 61
 Horace, 30, 58
 Humbert de Romans, 182
 Huot, Sylvia J., 90
 Hypsicratea, 169

 Irigaray, Luce, 120
 Isabeau de Bavière, 11, 17, 91, 96, 104,
 194
 Isabella of France, 194
 Iseut, 213
 Isidore of Seville, 138
 Isis, 161, 162, 165, 168

 Jaloux, 12, 25, 32, 39, 41
 Jason, 213
 Jean de Meung, *Rose*,
 alleged ‘poisonous’ effects of, 11, 17, 19,
 24, 34, 50, 145, 152
 expository indeterminacy of, 35–7,
 39–41, 56, 60
 Testament, 33
 see also allegory, Golden Age, love,
 marriage, Nature, Reason, women
 Jean de Montreuil, 8, 10–11, 14, 17, 18, 20,
 25, 28, 31, 33, 39
 Jean sans Peur, 90, 102 n. 55
 Jerome, St, 133, 144 n. 60
 Joanna, Queen of Sicily, 157
 John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 98
 ‘Journées Chrétiennes’, 184
 Judith, 13
 Juno, 62, 73
 Jupiter, 159
 Justice, 140, 145, 165
 Juvenal, 47

 Kane, John R., 9

 Kellogg, Judith L., 228
 Krueger, Roberta L., 177
 Kruger, Stephen F., 116
 Krynen, Jacques, 100

 Laidlaw, James C., 93
 Laomedon, 110
 Latini, Brunetto, 119
 Leander, 66
 Le Fèvre, Jehan, *Livre de Leesse*, 141
 Le Franc, Martin, 129
 Legrand, Jacques, 96, 104 n. 66
 Livre des bonnes meurs, 166, 199 n. 50
 Libera, 90, 92, 100–6, 110, 113, 114–16,
 117, 119, 123
 Livy, 136, 137
 Louis de Guyenne, 102 n. 55, 180
 Louis d’Orléans, 58, 59, 60–1, 90, 91, 96,
 104, 165
 Louis, St, 101
 love,
 Christine’s view of, 15, 67–8, 77, 171–2,
 201–3, 206–13
 in the *Rose*, 14–17, 65–78, 207–8
 Lucretia, 171
 Luke, St, 106, 146–7

 McLeod, Glenda, 105, 130–1, 163, 166
 Macra, St, 172
 Magdalene, Mary, 150
 Mahaut d’Artois, 194
 Mainardo dei Cavalcanti, 136
 Male Bouche, 209–10
 Margaret of Austria, 129
 Marguerite de Bourgogne, 180
 marriage,
 Christine’s view of, 151, 168–9, 171–2,
 198–9
 in the *Rose*, 13, 16–17, 37, 41–2
 Mars, 47
 Marsilio of Padua, 119
 Martina, St, 170, 172
 Mary, the Virgin, 141, 146–7, 149, 162
 Matheolus, *Lamentations*, 140–4
 Maximilla, 163
 Maximus, Valerius, 111
 Medea, 54, 85, 171
 Medusa, 85
 Menagier de Paris, *Menagier*, 181–2, 185,
 187–8, 194–7, 200, 202
 Mercury, 83, 165
 microcosm, theory of the, 75, 97–9, 109
 Minerva, 161, 162, 165
 Minnis, Alastair J., 29, 33, 37, 42, 44
 misogamy, 144, 183, 187 *see also* marriage

- misogyny,
 heterodox nature of, 14, 144–5
 see also women
 mythography, 47, 49, 53, 79, 94

 Narcissus, 65, 66–9
 Nature,
 in the *Avision*, 95, 99, 104, 120
 in the *Rose*, 37, 38, 41
 Nebuchadnezzar, 105, 191
 Nicostrata, 161, 165, 168
 Noakes, Susan, 55, 56

 Oiseuse, 31, 69
 Opinion, 90, 100, 106–13, 114, 119, 122,
 123, 125
 Othéa, 52, 59–62, 67, 68, 73–4, 76–7, 81
 Ouy, Gilbert, 93
 Ovid, 44, 47, 49, 159–60, 215
 Ars Amatoria, 13
 Metamorphoses, 159
Ovide moralisé, 47, 54, 58, 79

 Pallas, 73, 74
 Paris, 65, 72–7, 104
 Pasiphæe, 86
 Paul, St, 197
 Pegasus, 62
 Penelope, 171
 Penthesilea 67–8, 170
 Pépin, 102
 Petrarch,
 De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae, 132
 De Viris, 131–2, 135–6, 139, 140, 155–6
 Phebus, 85, 86
 Philippe de Mézières, *Vieil pelerin*, 95, 101–2
 Philosophie, 90, 106, 107, 110, 113, 116–19,
 121–6
Piers Plowman, 116
 Pliny, 133
 Plutarch, 59, 133
 ‘politics of visibility’, 200–6
 Proba, 168
 Prudence Mondaine, 193, 195, 201–6
 psychomachia, 189–92
 Pygmalion, 65, 67, 68–9, 72, 82
 Pythagoras, 108

 ‘querelle des femmes’, 8, 129
 Quilligan, Maureen, 46, 129

 Rachel, 203
 Raison,
 in Christine’s works, 140, 142–51, 160–2,
 164, 168, 171, 180, 198
 in the *Rose*, 12, 15, 16, 18, 25, 27, 37–8,
 39, 41, 49, 81, 160
 Rebecca, 13, 203
 Reno, Christine M., 54, 55, 91, 93, 95, 135
 Robertson, D. W., 9, 43
 Rose, the, 11, 13, 19, 70, 73, 78, 135, 207–8

 Sabine women, the, 169
 Sallust, 40
 Samson, 102
 Sarah, 13, 171, 203
 Saturn, 159
 Schibanoff, Susan, 54, 55, 79, 152
 Seville de Mont Hault, 211, 212
Secretum Secretorum, 97
 Semple, Benjamin, 91
 Seneca, 124
 sermons,
 ad status, 166, 182, 188, 197
 on marriage, 168
 as literary model, 48–9
 as political tool, 96–7
 Simone, Franco, 155
 Solomon, 32, 33, 34
 Song of Songs, 44
Songe du vergier, 102
 Suetonius, 133
 Susanna, 171
 Synoppe, 170

 Tarquin, 104
 Temperance, 76
 Tertullian, 139, 172, 199
 Theodosina, St, 170
 Thomas de Pizan, 1, 59, 114, 131
 Trajan, 59
 Tristan, 213
 Troy, 53, 67, 76, 77, 87, 110

 Ulysses, 64

 Venus, 45, 47, 69, 71, 73–4, 83
 Veturia, 158, 169
 Vieille, La, 12, 41, 160, 207–10, 211
 Virgil, 60, 145
 virginity, 135, 171, 177, 178, 198–9
 Visconti, Valentina, 165
 Vitz, Evelyn Birge, 113

 widowhood, 91, 114–16, 165, 177–8, 198
 Willard, Charity Cannon, 113
 women,
 and speech, 12, 21–2, 25–6, 150, 168–70,
 196–7, 199, 204–5
 and male chastity, 15, 33, 88

women (*cont.*)

- appearance of, 139
- as men's helpmeets, 151–2, 154
- as moral exemplars, 13, 26–8, 78–87, 163–73, 179–80
- chastity of, 78, 135, 171–2, 196–7, 199–200
- corporeality of, 50, 170–2, 183–6
- essential humanity of, 13–14, 22, 50, 119–20, 142, 149–50, 186–7
- generalisations about, 13–14, 26, 27

- public reputation of, 178–80, 190, 193–206
- rationality of, 21–3, 167, 180–2, 187–92
- theological proofs in defence of, 149–51
- see also* marriage, virginity, widowhood

Xerxes, 191

Yaguello, Marina, 80

Zenobia, 171

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

- 1 Robin Kirkpatrick *Dante's Inferno: Difficulty and Dead Poetry* 0 521 30757 0
- 2 Jeremy Tambling *Dante and Difference: Writing in the 'Commedia'* 0 521 34242 0
- 3 Simon Gaunt *Troubadours and Irony* 0 521 35439 0
- 4 Wendy Scrase *'Piers Plowman' and the New Anticlericalism* 0 521 36017 X
- 5 Joseph Duggan *The 'Cantar De Mio Cid': Poetic Creation in its Economic and Social Contexts* 0 521 36194 X
- 6 Roderick Beaton *The Medieval Greek Romance* 0 521 33335 0
- 7 Kathryn Kerby-Fulton *Reformist Apocalypticism and 'Piers Plowman'* 0 521 34298 8
- 8 Alison Morgan *Dante & the Medieval Other World* 0 521 36069 2
- 9 Eckehard Simon (ed.) *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama* 0 521 38514 8
- 10 Mary Carruthers *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* 0 521 38282 3 (hb) 0 521 42973 0 (pb)
- 11 Rita Copeland *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* 0 521 38517 2 (hb) 0 521 48365 4 (pb)
- 12 Donald Maddox *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions* 0 521 39450 3
- 13 Nicholas Watson *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* 0 521 39017 6
- 14 Steven F. Kruger *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* 0 521 41069 X
- 15 Barbara Nolan *Chaucer and the Tradition of the 'Roman Antique'* 0 521 39169 5
- 16 Sylvia Huot *The 'Romance of the Rose' and its Medieval Readers: Interpretations, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* 0 521 41713 9
- 17 Carol M. Meale (ed.) *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500* 0 521 40018 X
- 18 Henry Ansgar Kelly *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* 0 521 43184 0
- 19 Martin Irvine *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory, 350–1100* 0 521 41447 4
- 20 Larry Scanlon *Narrative, Authority and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* 0 521 43210 3
- 21 Erik Kooper *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context* 0 521 40222 0
- 22 Steven Botterill *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the 'Commedia'* 0 521 43454 8
- 23 Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (ed.) *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1530* 0 521 41979 4 (hb) 0 521 57576 1 (pb)
- 24 Christopher Baswell *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the 'Aeneid' from the Twelfth Century to Chaucer* 0 521 46294 0
- 25 James Simpson *Sciences and Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus' and John Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* 0 521 47181 8
- 26 Joyce Coleman *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* 0 521 55391 1
- 27 Suzanne Reynolds *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text* 0 521 47257 1
- 28 Charlotte Brewer *Editing 'Piers Plowman': The Evolution of the Text* 0 521 34250 3

- 29 Walter Haug *Vernacular Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: The German Tradition in its European Context* 0 521 34197 3
- 30 Sarah Spence *Texts and the Self in the Twelfth Century* 0 521 57279 7
- 31 Edwin Craun *Lies, Slander and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* 0 521 49690 X
- 32 Patricia E. Grieve *'Floire and Blancheflor' and the European Romance* 0 521 43162 X
- 33 Huw Pryce (ed.) *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* 0 521 57039 5
- 34 Mary Carruthers *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* 0 521 58232 6
- 35 Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart* 0 521 41153 X
- 36 Siân Echard *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* 0 521 62126 7
- 37 Fiona Somerset *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* 0 521 62154 2
- 38 Florence Percival *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* 0 521 41655 8
- 39 Christopher Cannon *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words* 0 521 59274 7
- 40 Rosalind Brown-Grant *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women* 0 521 64194 2